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Correspondence

Neoliberals & labor

Washington, D.C.

To the Editors: At one point in his report about *The Washington Monthly*'s Conference on Neoliberalism ["A Class Act," Nov. 18], Jim Sleeper says neoliberals think Western capitalism can end unemployment through labor discipline and asks, isn't "the nature of corporate investment, distorted by a variety of factors, including what Robert Reich calls the 'paper entrepreneurialism' of mergers, more to blame?"

First, we don't think "labor discipline" will do the job alone. We think managers and stockholders are going to have to make sacrifices, too. And we think the government must redirect its economic influence. In 1980 *The Washington Monthly* published Reich's "Pie Slicers vs. Pie Enlargers," calling for policies that specifically encourage investments in new plants and new jobs instead of giving equal encouragement to unproductive trading in existing assets. We began our attack on mergers as early as 1979 with Thomas Redburn's "The Merger Mania" (February 1979), which said, "Businessmen are spending their capital buying each other out, which neither creates jobs nor boosts productivity." And continued the attack through Joseph Nocera's "The Merger Mongers," published in December of last year.

When Sleeper says we aren't interested in economic democracy, he ignores our long advocacy of worker ownership — Walter Bish of the Weirton Steelworkers Union was one of the panelists at the conference — and our long record of criticism of welfare for the rich.

If you want to learn what we're really about, we can send you a copy of "A Neoliberal's Manifesto." Write *The Washington Monthly*, 1711 Connecticut Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.

CHARLES PETERS
Editor
The Washington Monthly

The author replies:

The outcome of a conference is often more telling than an index of its sponsoring publication, especially when the gathering is as portentiously billed and star-studded as was the neoliberal affair. There I saw more genuine alarm about the excesses of welfare for the poor than about the phenomenal growth of welfare for the rich, though the latter is surely more corrosive of the kind of society neoliberals want, if only because it does so much to engender the former. As for economic democracy, Walter Bish's contribution was minimal, and so was the attention accorded it.

I just don't think Charlie Peters's fair-mindedness will translate to political will — that is, to real sacrifices by the wealthy and to serious moves toward worker control — as long as he and others keep striking an illusory "balance" between the sins of the poor and the sins of the rich, the abuses of unions and the abuses of corporations. The former in each case are more visible and vulnerable to political censure because the latter inhere in the established power relationships within which most of us pattern our daily lives, our search for security, and, all too often, our quest for meaning. I think neoliberals want national consensus and comity too desperately to let themselves stand outside those established power relationships long enough to challenge them as a democratic movement really must. Probable result, when push comes to shove: labor discipline and crackdowns on programs for the poor, but only token moves toward productive investment and progressive taxation.

What with Peters plugging his "Neoliberal's Manifesto," I can't resist mentioning an extension of these remarks of mine in the upcoming spring issue of the quarterly *Dissent*, available in April.

JIM SLEEPER

Price of freedom

New York, N.Y.

To the Editors: In the Sept. 9, 1983 issue of *Commonweal*, Professor Mieczyslaw Maneli reported on a lecture at the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences of America in New York, by the Rev. Piotr Taras, Professor at the Catholic University of Lublin, Poland, in which the latter attacked KOR, whose leaders have been imprisoned in Poland, in an emotional way, using, according to Professor Maneli, biased arguments, not corroborated by facts.

In this connection it should be first of all stated that the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences of America has several times issued protests against the arrests of Solidarity leaders, particularly KOR members. In these protests we demanded the immediate release of the imprisoned.

But to return to the Rev. Taras, the Polish Institute, a Polish-American scholarly institution, cannot censor lectures in advance of delivery. Freedom of speech and intellectual freedom is the basic principle of our institution.

We do not and will not exercise censorship of lectures and writings. Nor can we prevent abuse of this freedom. Academic qualifications are usually considered as sufficient to warrant the hospitality of our Lecture Hall and an invitation to visitors from Europe. A variety of views have been expressed in those lectures, views often adverse to our own opinion.

It goes without saying that a scholarly institution which continues the tradition of the Polish Academy of Sciences (founded in 1816) and of American

(Continued on page 95)

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RACE TO THE FINISH

"OUR WORK is not finished," Ronald Reagan explained in announcing his candidacy for reelection. He is certainly right. The president promised lower taxes, a balanced budget, and economic recovery. Taking into account the increases in Social Security, most Americans have heard more talk about tax cuts than actually benefited from them. The deficit appears to be launched, like one of our satellites, into outer space. And the durability of recovery, unquestionably here at last, appears to depend heavily on how the tangle of taxes, spending commitments, and deficits gets straightened out. The president promised peace through military preparedness. The requirements of military preparedness, in the administration's view, seem to balloon constantly, while the breakthrough to agreement with a chastened Moscow recedes further and further into the distance. Still, it is the president's contention that his administration has led the country through the hard work of laying a foundation — and his next term will bring the rewards. It is the Democrats' contention that we are not digging a basement but a hole in the ground and that the rewards of recent sacrifices are threatened by (a) another economic recession once the deficit triggers tight money; (b) a fiscal crisis that would require deep cuts in basic social spending, not only for the poor and near-poor this time but for the average wage-earning household as well; (c) war, in Central America or the Mideast or even worse.

On the first two of these points, the experts (the "naysayers," President Reagan would call them) certainly share a lot of the Democrats' fears. On the third point, it is the public that is deeply uneasy. One would think, then, that the Democrats would be in fine shape. Obviously, it's not so. *Their* readiness to deal with the deficit is not all that apparent; and though their approach to Central America and Moscow might be far more modulated than Mr. Reagan's, the way they have swung back and forth on Lebanon suggests they offer no more direction for that tinderbox region than does the administration.

Looming above these claims and counter-claims about policies, is of course, Ronald Reagan's own personality and his incomparable talent for articulating his plans and deeds in terms of deep-rooted national sentiments. Mr. Reagan's America is a giant little house on the prairie, struggling through the locust years, fighting off the Indians, always firm in prayer and song around the family hearth. This may only bespeak the president's ability, as *The New Republic* put it, "to infect others with his illusions." But at least it is a vision, and it will have to be met with a vision of equal power, not with the picture of the country as an endless social-welfare agency or a hi-tech marvel of economic competitiveness. A lot of Americans suspect that the country and the world don't really work the way that their apple-cheeked and crinkly-eyed leader, by maxim and anecdote, insists. But they haven't yet encountered an alternative that comes as close to matching their instincts.

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ON THE POPE'S GESTURE

Nineteen Eighty-Four, the novel, ends with a flash of images in the mind of the gin-drenched hero: from the white-tiled corridor of the Ministry of Love to the enormous face of Big Brother. Nineteen eighty-four, the year, began with quite a different image, not of a white-tiled prison corridor but of a white-walled prison cell; not of Big Brother's triumphant gaze but of the Holy Father's bowed head.

The pope's visit to the cell of Mehmet Ali Agca caught the world's imagination — like so much of what the pope does. From many different quarters came the acknowledgment that a lesson had been taught. Yet great lessons — the parables of Jesus or the dialogues of Socrates — are not like catechism questions; they do not simply trigger single, prepackaged responses. The pope's gesture provoked *Time* magazine, for instance, into running a rather unusual cover story on forgiveness, but one that wandered into uncomfortable questions about personal reconciliation and social justice. *Time* may have also made some readers uncomfortable by reminding them that if you could have pulled back far enough on that picture of pope and assassin hunched together, you would have brought into view a still photographer snapping away and a television crew, all brought along from the Vatican. The pope does not leave his media coverage to chance.

Well, okay, if John Paul II were not a master of the media, then no one, not *Time* nor *Commonweal* either, would have been provoked into writing, or reflecting. Unfortunately, the reflecting, once started, does not stay put. "I think it was an admirable gesture," a Catholic woman at a post-holiday gathering declared, "but would the pope have visited Hans Küng? Or held out his hand to Agnes Mansour?" Is magnanimity easy, in other words, when the offender is convicted before the world, locked in prison, and no longer any threat to one's person or position? How much harder forgiveness is when one is not so thoroughly in control.

But isn't this only the tired carping of a kind of post-conciliar Catholic, reflexively looking for the ungenerous interpretation of whatever the papacy and Vatican do? We think not. It is true that the speaker, as woman and wife, had a number of grievances against John Paul II, but she knew that her point cut more than one way: "Am *I* willing to be reconciled with *him*, even though he keeps encouraging policies that I believe injure me and my daughters?"

By reconciliation she did not have in mind an abandonment of convictions that were crucial to her, an intellectual I'm-OK/You're OK that would trivialize in sentiment or good cheer differences worth struggling over. But she did know — as all of us do — how easily those honest differences build up their coating of toxic anger, ready stereotyping, suspicious questioning of motives. For the pope to visit Hans Küng, or vice versa, would not be to deny the conflicts of principle they may have but to repudiate the animosities that surround those differences and to pledge that the confrontation of beliefs will not lead to the dehumanization of opponents.

But why stop there? John Paul and Hans Küng, our friend and the pope — how about us? Are we willing to hold out a reconciling hand not merely to those no longer able to create difficulties for us but to, well, a Michael Novak? Perhaps this forgiveness stuff is getting out of control. . . .

All right, all right, we'll all meet for a drink — the pope, our woman friend, Hans Küng, ourselves, and Michael Novak. Now who's buying?

Going on 60

From Commonweal twenty-five years ago:

"It seems to me that the spirit of Catholicism is based on an openness of mind and of vision that militates against everything that is petty, sectarian, pietistic or tainted with puritanism. The Catholic, almost by definition, should be engaged unceasingly in relating the many aspects of current reality to the one overwhelming Reality that is the center of faith. And it is here that there is room for healthy debate and vigorous disagreement among Catholics. Here is found the area of utmost freedom. It is here, too, that the ultimate argument against a party-line mentality is to be found. This is the frontier, the meeting of ancient principle with new fact. It is on this frontier, as I see it, that the opinion-journalist must take his stand, even at the cost of being a controversial figure, which is a cheap enough price to pay."

—John Cogley, "Reflections of a Controversial Figure"
February 13, 1959

ETC.

• Over the years no visitor brought greater pleasure or stimulus to the *Commonweal* office than Msgr. Luigi Ligutti, who died in Rome at Christmastime at the age of eighty-eight. He was buried in Iowa in the countryside he so greatly loved. Back of his geniality and wit, and modest though imposing presence, was confidence in the cause he warmly championed, a populist cause suggested by such elements as the family farm, "back to the land," one foot in agriculture, the other in industry, credit unions, and cooperatives. It was a grass-roots movement that also concerned this magazine in the 1940s and '50s when Monsigner Ligutti was the director of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference. His establishment of the worker-built Granger Homesteads, each home with its own fertile vegetable plot, was one of his best known achievements.

Monsignor Ligutti rounded out his productive and distinguished career as the Vatican's permanent observer at the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization from 1949 to 1970. Doubtless the successful family farm, while still an ideal, is more difficult than it was to achieve in this country now. But the various techniques that Monsignor Ligutti developed and so happily exemplified would be, if greatly expanded, a boon among many of the hard-pressed peoples of the third world today. We will miss both the man and his work.

E.S.S.

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• Some years ago, Andrew M. Greeley publicly expressed a great deal of bitterness about being refused tenure at the University of Chicago. It was hard not to sympathize with Greeley's complaints, for whatever one may think of him as a polemicist and fiction-writer, as a professional sociologist Greeley has been outstanding.

We recalled Greeley's harsh words about his treatment at Chicago when we read that the priest-sociologist has given the university $1.1 million of his fiction royalties to endow a chair in Catholic studies. Whether he was motivated by pure affection for alma mater, by a desire to promote Catholic studies, or by an irresistible urge to heap coals of fire, altogether this was a classy act. It is seldom one encounters a deed that nourishes the future in itself and yet is so deliciously savored with irony. Father Greeley and *Commonweal* have had their differences; we don't know if he thinks we've treated him as badly as the University of Chicago did, but we're beginning to hope so.

Washington report

WINNOWING PPSSCC

SOME SKEPTICISM IS CALLED FOR

"BUSINESS WITHOUT profit is not business anymore than a pickle is candy." These hallowed words of the American industrialist Charles Frederick Abbott would not find a receptive audience within the Reagan administration — at least with regard to the principles underpinning the recommendations of the President's Private Sector Survey on Cost Control (PPSSCC). This presidential commission's final two-volume, 656-page report was formally presented to Mr. Reagan on January 16 by Chairman J. Peter Grace after more than two thousand "private sector volunteers," led by a 161-member executive committee (which constitutes "a major segment of the business leadership of the U.S."), conducted an eighteen-month study on how to improve the management of the executive branch and reduce federal costs.

President Reagan announced the creation of the commission on February 18, 1982, and signed the executive order officially establishing what has come to be known as the PPSSCC or the Grace Commission on June 30, 1982. As observed in the weighty final report, the president had decided to establish the PPSSCC because he "has always had a long-standing philosophical commitment to the goal of conducting the affairs of government according to principles of sound business and fiscal management. . . ." The question arises as to whether the principles of business are applicable to governmental operations. Given the absence of profit as an objective of government, if one were to take to heart the words of Charles Frederick Abbott, they might be serving pickled jelly beans at the White House.

Republican governors in the 1960s favored a "good government" device of inducing businessmen to undertake well-publicized management studies of their state bureaucracies and then claiming the results as great savings to the taxpayer. This exercise was successfully conducted by Ohio's James A. Rhodes, Oklahoma's Dewey Bartlett, and California's Ronald Reagan.

The president referred to his California experience with satisfaction at a March 1982 luncheon inaugurating the venture of new Commission Chairman Grace and his executive committee. After telling a couple of good stories about finding "fantastic savings," he noted that 1,600 of the business executives' 2,000 recommendations were implemented in his administration. Yet the usually sympathetic *Business Week* characterized such task forces as the PPSSCC as having an "uneven record," and observed that the 1967 effort of Governor Reagan "found only $25 million in actual savings."

The PPSSCC's final report, the press release, and Grace's press conference were replete with good anecdotal material on inefficient and costly governmental practices. The commission's thirty-six task force reports and eleven special studies provide the support (together with 1.8 million pages in background materials) for the final report's 2,478 recommendations and a claimed total savings potential of $424.4 billion over three years.

There is reason for some skepticism that such a saving could be realized — even if the proposals were politically feasible, which some clearly are not. There are commission proposals that have been around from time immemorial and very little has been done about them. Item: the panel observes that more than a third of the nation's post offices (12,469) serve one hundred or fewer customers (savings $272 million). Item: Congress prevents closing bases the military wants to eliminate (savings $3.1 billion). Item: all the military commissaries in the continental U.S. could be abolished (savings $1 billion).

In fact, skepticism has followed Grace's efficiency task forces as they have released certain of their recommendations throughout the past eighteen months. The navy task force, for

EDITOR WANTED

Commonweal will be seeking an additional editor sometime in early spring. The position would involve writing, editing, working with authors, and numerous routine production tasks, much of this done under pressure and in a stimulating but spartan environment. There is some flexibility in regard to the starting date.

Applicants should be Roman Catholic lay women or men with wide cultural and political interests and knowledge. A demonstrated talent for lively, incisive writing is essential; some editorial experience is preferred. Four-day work week but modest salary. Applications by mail only. Applicants should include full curriculum vitae or resumé, writing samples, and a letter describing themselves and their interest in *Commonweal*. All applications will be considered confidential and given careful attention.

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example, had estimated savings of $4 billion to $5 billion over three years in recommended management improvements; but when its proposals were approved and released by Grace's committee, the savings estimate had expanded to $7.2 billion. When the navy project manager, accounting firm executive Robert Cockrill, challenged the commission's leadership on this change, arguing that the figure ignored immediately needed equipment investments such as new computers, he was overruled. Cockrill was quoted by the *Los Angeles Times* as commenting, "Peter Grace is a pretty hard-headed man."

Notwithstanding such virtues as Mr. Grace may have, his assertion last September that the commission's recommendations were "irrefutable" has not been left unchallenged. A recommended tightening of civil service retirement benefits, also released earlier last year, was claimed to save $16 billion over three years. This figure was contested by Rep. William Ford of Michigan, Chairman of the House Post Office and Civil Service Committee. At his request, two congressional support agencies, the General Accounting Ofice and the Congressional Budget Office, were asked to review the task force study. CBO revised the savings estimate to less than $2 billion. CBO Director Rudolph Penner was quoted in November as saying, "Based on the few cases we have had a chance to investigate, the savings potential of a number of the Grace Commission's recommendations may be only a small fraction of the amount stated."

How refutable the commission's proposals and savings actually are will be better determined after the completion of a joint CBO/GAO study of the entire package of recommendations. Their analysis is likely to be presented before a Senate Budget Committee hearing, tentatively scheduled for February 28.

Since a number of the recommendations have been incorporated into the administration's FY 1985 budget, an objective and expert winnowing of PPSSCC's wheat from its chaff is needed as soon as possible. (It is interesting to note that a number of the task forces relied heavily on earlier GAO reports and recommendations.) For the past five months the commission's proposals have been reviewed by OMB, the agencies affected, and the White House. Presidential adviser Ed Meese, as chairman of the Cabinet Council on Management and Administration, is overseeing the White House response to the PPSSCC recommendations as well as coordinating a parallel initiative, Reform '88 — a long-range internal management effort of top government executives (it's '88 because it will take six years to implement) with the goal of making government operate as "efficiently . . . as an Exxon," according to OMB deputy director Joseph Wright. At the September 1982 unveiling of this "major management reform" package, Ed Meese said it was a top priority of the president, who wants to leave "the American people . . . as part of his legacy . . . a government that acts in a business-like manner."

The White House officials would undoubtedly cringe at Professor Wallace Sayre's observation that "business and public administration are alike only in all unimportant respects." The Reagan administration takes an apparent leap of faith that government ought to be run like business, notwithstanding the consequences that flow from the absence of profit as an organization's principal objective; namely, as noted by Yale University's James Fesler, that while a corporation's objective is single and clear, and its performance is easily measurable — profit or loss — a government agency's objective is usually not single but plural, and there is no direct comparison between the agency's cost and the return received by the public for its services.

The PPSSCC's final report places itself within the "rich tradition of public-private partnership" that has sought to improve the workings of government: the Taft Commission, the Brownlow Committee, the two Hoover Commissions, the Ash Council, and the Carter Reorganization Project (try to obtain a published study from that costly venture). Yet the preface of the final report begins with the following:

> Most reports of Presidential Commissions begin with lengthy introductions detailing the origins, premises, and methodologies of their studies before focusing on the results of the study. We are omitting such matters because we do not want to risk losing even one reader who might be turned away by having to wade through such preliminary material.

Well this reader was immediately lost with *that* beginning. What laziness — at best. The Ash Council, for example, set forth its notion of management and the principles it was applying. Whether you agreed or disagreed with them, at least they could be discussed. The examination of the PPSSCC does not go very far beyond the Calvin Coolidge maxim, "The business of America is business."

Elmer Staats, former Comptroller General of the United States (the head of GAO) and, ironically, a member of Grace's executive committee, remarked a decade ago: "Many businessmen who come to Washington are not notable successes and . . . they average less than two years. They bring experience and capability, but they lack an understanding of the environment of government." The implications of Mr. Staats's perspective appear not to have influenced Mr. Grace and his 160 colleagues. The management of money is not the only context in which to analyze a government agency's operations. The government's environment is one of law, within which equity and efficiency are constantly being balanced.

One might take as symbolic of the PPSSCC's respect for context that the chapter discussing the commission's background begins with what is presented as a single quote of Thomas Jefferson — but turns out, upon investigation, to be the stringing together of three separate sentences from letters of Jefferson written between 1802 and 1816. As common as this shoddy practice may be, it also indicates the precision and care with which this panel spent more than $75 million tax-deductible dollars. And now a considerable amount of taxpayer dollars have to be spent to put it to some *public* use.

JEREMIAH BARUCH

(Jeremiah Baruch is the pseudonym of a Washington writer with a position in government.)

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Task Force on Food Assistance

AMATEUR HOUR

THE REPORT WARMS UP LEFTOVERS

IF THE ISSUE weren't so serious, it would be tempting to treat the President's Task Force on Food Assistance as a bad joke. Consider a few facts. Only three of the thirteen task force members who signed the final report had even bothered to attend all the public hearings where evidence of hunger was presented; half the task force showed up for less than half of the meetings (Sandra Smolley, representing county government, attended none of the public hearings; Mayor Berkley of Kansas City and former Governor King of Massachusetts came to only two meetings; Midge Decter of New York and J.P. Bolduc attended only one). Compounding the lack of interest was the lack of any understanding of the issue: Task Force Chair J. Clayburn La Force and most of the task force members acknowledged that they knew almost nothing of hunger, food assistance, or nutrition before being named to the task force; incredibly, neither did the staff assembled to help them.

Under the circumstances, one might expect the testimony of expert witnesses who actually knew something about the subject to weigh heavily with the task force and its staff. "Numerous witnesses have testified to us in the most forceful terms about the existence of widespread, and growing, hunger in this country," according to the task force report. But the inexperienced, non-expert members of the task force chose to ignore the numerous witnesses and studies presented to them in order to conclude: "We have not been able to substantiate allegations of rampant hunger." Hospital-based studies providing clinical evidence of malnutrition in children was presented to the task force, revealing that three times the expected number of children were failing to grow and develop normally by standard measures. In Massachusetts, the State Department of Public Health carried out a year-long survey of over 1,400 pre-school children and found that ten percent were chronically malnourished, three percent acutely malnourished. Representatives of the American Public Health Association noted that the government's own health statistics show, by conservative estimates, that half a million pre-school children suffer from malnutrition. Yet the task force concluded: ". . . there is no evidence that widespread undernutrition is a major health problem in the United States."

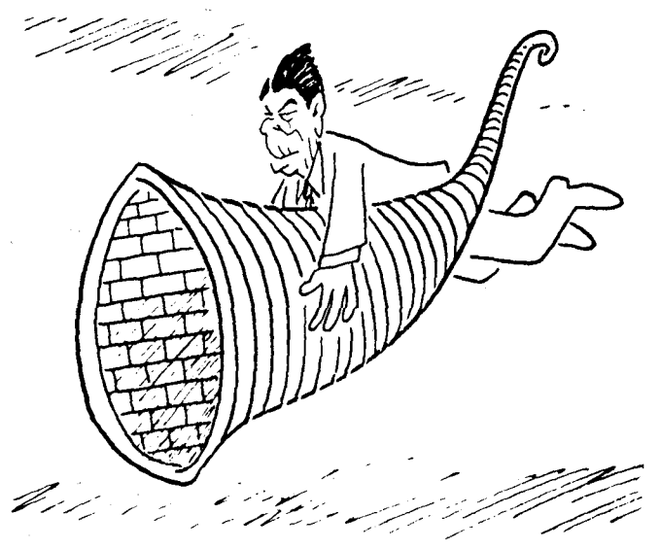
The recommendations made to the president by the task force similarly had little relationship to the testimony of the various witnesses. And there was a certain logic to the process: having ignored the evidence, they found no serious problem; under the circumstances, they saw no reason for remedial action.

The task force report's major recommendation is that all food assistance programs should be combined in a "block grant" and made a responsibility of the states. None of the witnesses appearing before the task force urged or even suggested such a course of action, and the proposal was not included in the first draft of the report. It was inserted at the insistence of a task force member who had served in the Reagan administration and who had helped develop similar proposals (which have already been considered and rejected by the Congress). Most of the task force did not see the recommendation until just a few hours before they voted to accept it.

Significantly, the two elected officials on the panel voted "no" to that proposal and there was a strong letter from the National Governors' Association before the task force urging them to reject any recommendations that food assistance programs be given to them in a block grant. (The U.S. Conference of Mayors and the National Association of Counties also oppose the recommendation.)

It is difficult not to be cynical. This task force composed of people who were new to the issue, or hostile to food assistance programs, or simply uninterested, has acknowledged that they did not have time to investigate the problems adequately. Nonetheless, they felt competent to recommend sweeping changes in the existing food assistance programs, along with a few token improvements that were likely to be passed by Congress in any event. They seem to have been reading from a script that was written at the White House.

Participation in existing federal food programs (like the school lunch program, food stamps, or the WIC program for high-risk pregnant women, nursing mothers, and young children) would become optional with the states under the task force's proposal. A state could choose to operate food programs only in schools or in senior centers or in neither of those.



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Whether the unemployed and their families could get help would depend on their political standing with the state legislature.

Once before, food programs were optional, and many local governments refused to provide any food assistance at all or, in some places, refused food during seasons when there was fruit to be picked, or to people who worked in voter registration drives. In the days before there were national standards for food stamps, malnutrition was widespread among the poor and reports of civil-rights violations in the provision of food aid were common. That is why there are national standards and federal programs today: because of compelling evidence that food programs operating under state and local controls left many people hungry and malnourished.

President Reagan's task force apparently wishes to see a return to those days. Task force members carried on a discussion at their final meeting that made clear their ignorance of the programs, their history, and even of the recommendations on which they cast their votes. Altogether it was a shabby performance.

Meanwhile, their principal finding amounted to an exercise in trivializing a serious national problem. The report speaks of "a possible exception" (to the general rule that undernutrition is not a problem), of "some people" who "have difficulties with access to food," and of "children who are sometimes sent to bed without food." The general impression left by the report is of rare occurrences, of the sort of occasional lapses in coverage that are naturally found in any large system. There is no indicator, they declare, that will "tell us where and by how much hunger has gone up in recent years."

One wonders what more they require. The government's own official statistics show that poverty has risen dramatically since 1978, and the poverty line is, by definition, an estimate of people with less income than what is thought to be needed for "an emergency short-term diet when funds are very low." In the absence of other more sophisticated studies, it is a very good surrogate for a "hunger count." At a minimum it tells us whether there are more or fewer people at risk of hunger, and the general magnitude of the problem. And the picture in 1982 was clear: between 34 and 46 million Americans had incomes so low as to put them at risk of hunger.

In addition there have been the medical studies, the state and local studies, the reports by national church and voluntary organizations, and the testimony of elected officials at federal, state, and local levels. Across the country, members of the press have done their share in documenting hunger in reports carried on the front pages of newspapers nationwide. The President's Task Force may have no "indicators" that hunger is a problem, but millions of Americans have the evidence of their own experience to tell them otherwise. They and the hungry deserved better than this $350,000 presidential amateur hour on hunger.

NANCY AMIDEI

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Latin America & the U.S.

IDEOLOGY VS. THE IAF

AN OMEN FOR FUTURE AID

A DOZEN YEARS ago, the Nixon administration used to respond to critics of its foreign policy by asking them to "watch what we do, not what we say." It was good advice then, as it is now. Henry Kissinger, at the center of the policy process in those days, was tough but correct in his public pronouncements toward Allende's government in Chile. But behind the scenes, as we learned later, he was willing to do virtually anything to sabotage the Chilean experiment. Our real policy — what our government actually did — was quite different from our declared policy.

With Kissinger back in our Latin American policy again, it is worth bringing out the old Nixonian advice — particularly since Reagan's administration, unlike Nixon's, considers the hemisphere a matter of "vital national interest." The Kissinger Commission on Central America has presented its recommendation as a "bipartisan consensus." Our policy, it says, must address the needs both of security and development. The military side of the proposed bargain is clear enough. It essentially endorses what the administration is already doing (as it reflects Kissinger's own Hobbesian world view). But what of the other side of the compromise, the unprecedented program of aid, the concern for "democracy" and "human development"? Isn't it worth legitimating a U.S.commitment to such values, even if the price is continuing military aid?

The answers turn on what our government, in the name of those values, will actually do. The past three years give a fair basis for forecasts about a (second) Reagan administration. Its military approach is as clear as the Teddy Roosevelt-like naval task forces off both Central America's coasts, the 3,000 U.S. troops already in Honduras (with the biggest U.S. embassy in Latin America after Mexico), the hundreds of millions in training and matériel to El Salvador, the covert aid to the *contras*, and the studied refusal to foreswear an invasion of Nicaragua. The administration makes no mystery about its use of military instruments (and indeed takes palpable pleasure over its exhibitions of pumping iron).

Its approach to development may be less obvious. It has cut the U.S. contribution for World Bank loans to the poorest nations (IDA), but it has also put through a Caribbean Basin Initiative worth $350 million (some $75 million of which is targeted to El Salvador). Now the Kissinger Commission has recommended a five-year, $8 billion regional development program. It has suggested a new Central American Development Organization, headed by a United States official holding veto power. The Reagan administration may well accept these

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recommendations in some form. How would it actually use such aid? How would such a new development organization operate?

Significant clues are provided by the way the administration has dealt recently with a small, widely respected agency called the Inter-American Foundation. The IAF was founded in 1969 on the initiative of Congress as an experimental alternative to unwieldy existing aid programs. It was meant to support grass-roots projects directly, bypassing governmental bureaucracy. That implied, in Congress's view, independence from the constraints of official diplomacy and short-term foreign policy. In its dozen years of operation, the IAF has been recognized as a singular success. Disbursing 1,600 grants for $170 million in 25 countries, it was widely praised for actually reaching the poor and identifying the United States with humane and constructive change. It has enjoyed unusually broad congressional support — from conservatives such as Jack Kemp (R-N.Y.) to liberals such as Michael Barnes (D-Md.) — and the backing of the Nixon, Ford, and Carter administrations.

The Reagan administration, however, has been hostile to the Inter-American Foundation since the day it came into office. For three years it has attempted to change the IAF's key personnel and basic purposes. In December 1983 it used its new majority on the IAF's board (in a straight partisan vote, the first in its history) to fire the organization's president, Peter Bell. The administration showed particular animus toward Bell, a former Deputy Undersecretary in HEW and Ford Foundation official (director of the office in Chile that moviegoers will remember as an island of decency in *Missing*). But the administration's concerns are more institutional than personal. Its intentions have been spelled out quite clearly for this small agency, and they speak volumes about its conception of our broader role in Latin American development.

In November 1981 the Heritage Foundation issued a report on the IAF which has proven an accurate guide to administration action to date. The report lauded the IAF for its low overhead and cost-effectiveness but castigated it for three basic sins. The IAF had been naive, the report argued, for putting into practice its belief that "they know how" — that Latin Americans at the grass roots knew best what they needed and could take responsibility for their own initiatives. In addition, the IAF had shown a willingness in some cases to support groups which, if not actually linked to Communist or other leftist parties, were certainly not friends of the Reagan administration. (Three projects of the Chilean church were singled out for special criticism.) Finally, the report concluded, the IAF operated with autonomy from official U.S. policy, and was insufficiently responsive to our embassies abroad and the local organizations they were backing.

The Inter-American Foundation has defended its record against these criticisms, but what is important here is the philosophy behind them. They suggest a radically different approach to development for the IAF — one which seems to have considerable fit with the broader conceptions of the Kissinger Commission. As the Heritage Foundation has put it, "development" will mean not working with "socialistic" projects such as cooperatives but rather those under the guidance of "suitable local businessmen." The criteria for "target groups" will also be made explicitly political, bringing them "in tune with U.S. foreign policy" and excluding support to organizations judged "socialist or Marxist-Leninist." A duty to "promote the concepts and practice of free enterprise" goes with the "responsibility to develop democratic institutions." We should "foster hope . . . for a better life," but a hope "based on a realistic understanding that progress occurs gradually and incrementally," not in "convulsive and chaotic shifts." Institutionally that means "closer coordination" of the whole U.S. development effort of private and governmental organizations.

The Heritage Foundation language may be ideological, but the assumptions of its analysis are widely shared in the Reagan administration. They display an odd mixture of arrogance and lack of confidence. On one hand, they assert that we can control and manage social change in Latin Amrerica, that it can be "incremental" and not "convulsive" — in effect, that "*we* know how," not they. On the other hand, they show a deep lack of confidence in our own judgment and in our own character as a great and liberal nation. They do not allow us to work with anyone who shares our values but insists on his or her integrity, anyone who does not give us ritualistic reassurance of client status to our patronage. They assert that we can serve the national interest and know our friends only with a political litmus test, administered by the White House.

The Inter-American Foundation operated on very different premises through its first dozen years. The firing of its president portends a larger campaign, but the IAF has not been dismantled yet. The new president will be crucial. Peter Bell and his predecessor, William Dyal, were selected after screening by an outside consulting agency. Both were men of unusual vision, integrity, and experience. It remains to be seen whether the current search committee, all appointed under the

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Reagan administration, will follow the same process or will find someone of the same quality. After the new president is named, there are several key areas which will indicate whether the administration is continuing to follow the Heritage Foundation scenario. One of these is staffing. Over the years the IAF recruited a staff that belies the reputation of government agencies — it is energetic, idealistic, experienced, efficient. It has worked with exceptional morale and a fruitful delegation of authority. Whether a new president will reaffirm those strengths — or change them — should be quickly apparent. So, too, should any changes of criteria for grant making. El Salvador is likely to be the test case. The IAF has believed that the violence and politicization of conditions in recent years have necessarily limited its useful role there. But there are strong pressures from the administration to increase our aid there greatly and to target it explicitly to our "friends."

The fate of the Inter-American Foundation is in the hands of Congress. The House Foreign Affairs hearings at the end of January may help clarify the administration's intentions and mobilize the IAF's congressional supporters. But sustaining a defense of its autonomy and character will not be easy. It faces a formidable coalition of ideological and bureaucratic forces that would like to remake it. And it must compete for congressional attention with the large issues of war and peace that now have such unfortunate immediacy.

Our foreign policy, however — what our government actually does abroad — is to a large extent determined in dozens of specific arenas within a vast institutional apparatus. When the public debates and big decisions take place, they occur within a context established by many small and less public choices. Until now, the Inter-American Foundation, in its modest way, has suggested that the United States could genuinely cooperate with Latin Americans in their own development, not merely patronize or manipulate them. That does not seem to be the context Reagan policy is constructing.

ALEXANDER WILDE

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Of several minds: *John Garvey*

WHEN WORDS GO PRIVATE

A REVOLUTION ALTERING OUR SENSE OF THE SACRED

WRITING of Ambrose, St. Augustine says, "When he read, his eyes scanned the page and his heart explored the meaning, but his voice was silent and his tongue was still. All could approach him freely and it was not unusual for visitors to be announced, so that often, when we came to see him, we found him reading like this in silence, for he never read aloud. We would sit there quietly, for no one had the heart to disturb him when he was so engrossed in study." Augustine offers several possible explanations for Ambrose's curious habit of reading quietly and concludes that "whatever his reason, we may be sure it was a good one" (*Confessions*, translated by R. S. Pine-Coffin, Penguin Books, 1961).

Augustine found the fact of silent reading unusual enough to comment on it; today we consider a man who moves his lips when he reads to be barely literate. It is difficult for us to imagine an age in which students and teachers commonly read aloud, even when studying alone. There are other strange hints in the lives of various saints — they are said to have prayed aloud frequently, and this is commented on matter-of-factly, as if it were more common to pray out loud than to pray quietly. Much of what we consider a silent, interior thing — reading or prayer, for example — was at one point rather noisy. What has happened is not, I think, a matter of human evolution so much as it is a radically changed relationship with words.

Socrates worried that the advent of writing would sap the power of memory by allowing people to rely on the crutch written words provided. In Augustine's time it is clear that the written word was still close to speech; it was written in order to be proclaimed. To read silently, to regard reading as a private act, had to be explained. There is something defensive about Augustine's assertion that Ambrose's quiet reading must have had a good reason behind it.

It was probably the invention of movable type and the democratization of literacy that led us to separate the word from its place in the public and physical world — by which I mean the place in which words had to do with the the human voice and social role of the person who proclaimed them. When words became an interior commodity, something private and detached, a profound shift happened. Without arguing that the shift was a good or bad thing, I want to suggest that we have not considered it enough. This column will come to no firm conclusions; I hope it will reveal something of the oddness of our situation, the strangeness of our relationship to words. The written word itself is very new in terms of the whole of human history. The liturgical settings which we are used to in synagogues and churches arose in their original form during a time when words were meant to be proclaimed. There are traces of words-as-proclamation in political speaking and on newscasts. The cadences of a political speech would be clearly out of place in casual conversation (as would the curious habit of politicians who refer to themselves in the third person: the governor of Illinois, Jim Thompson, will sometimes refer to Jim Thompson, as if he himself were absent —a habit very little children also have). Imagine the tone of voice and wagging head motions of television anchorfolk

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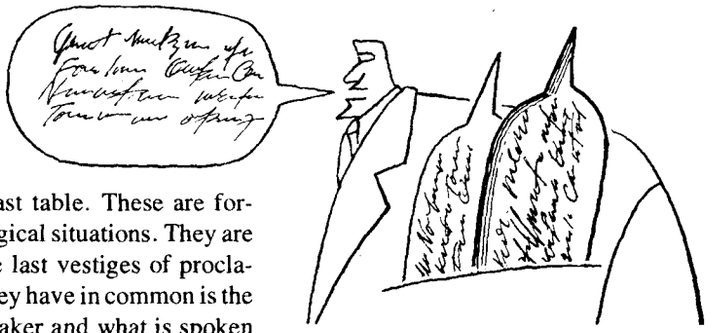

across a breakfast table. These are formal, nearly liturgical situations. They are also perhaps the last vestiges of proclamation. What they have in common is the fact that the speaker and what is spoken are necessarily joined. But this isn't the case with (for example) the radio, or the telephone, where the spoken word has a detached quality because the speaker isn't visible and really doesn't need to be. (Sometimes that invisibility is an advantage, as when someone speaking politely on the telephone rolls his eyes or makes obscene gestures for the benefit of someone watching the conversation.) A further detachment — detachment from the voice itself — is found in reading, and while concentrated reading has its own depth and intensity, it lacks something that can be found only in the spoken word.

It is hard to define that something, but it comes close to magic, and a primitive sense of the power of the word. Traces of it remain in various familial links and in children's culture. When I was a child my grandmother used to chant a nonsense rhyme to me. It went like this: "Skinna minna ringo, you and I jingo, solomon a bingo, walla walla wee, salanda sumbay umbum bar o'*soap*!" She was a sane and strait-laced lady who, playing with grandchildren, could say such things. And they were fun and funny to hear, because they came from her of all people; but they had a silly magic, too, something freer than words usually had about them. Later in grade school I heard girls on the playground chanting skip-rope rhymes, and one of the most popular was "Mary had a *ba*by, wrapped it up in *tis*sue paper, threw it down the *el*evator SHAFT! *First* floor, *se*cond floor, *third* floor. . . . " It never seemed to occur to the girls who sang this out, their ropes slapping the blacktop with each number, that the unfortunate baby was falling upward. Even before I had seen the spooky and comic drawings of Edward Gorey I saw one of his pale little people, trailing tissue in a dark ascent over the Saint Agnes playground. And then there was the experience of hearing some words for the first time, something which stays with you more mysteriously and tangibly than when you read them, though there is another palpable pleasure there. I remember being told by a classmate who seemed to know more about the mysteries than I did about those strange people who contained both sexes in their bodies. I couldn't believe that such people existed, and he said solemnly, "Yes, they do. They're called Morphendykes." I can see his face and the brick wall behind him to this day, and I always have to translate the word "hermaphrodite" into its *real* meaning before I can appreciate it.

I don't know how much television has cut into children's culture, but that special world which exists on playgrounds and in vacant lots and alleys and the places where children gather away from their elders is one of the last places where language still has its power as a form of magic. That magic was more common once. There is an anonymous seventeenth-century ballad which the *Oxford Book of English Verse* calls "Loving Mad Tom," though it is also known as "Tom O'Bedlam." Here are its first and last stanzas:

From the hag and hungry goblin
That into rags would rend ye
All the spirits that stand by the naked man
In the Book of Moons defend ye!
That of your five sound senses
You never be forsaken
Nor wander from yourselves with Tom
Abroad to beg your bacon . . . .
With an host of furious fancies,
Whereof I am commander,
With a burning spear, and a horse of air,
To the wilderness I wander.
By a knight of ghosts and shadows
I am summoned to a tourney,
Ten leagues beyond the wide world's end.
Me thinks it is no journey.

There is something fascinating about the magic here — I would certainly like to know more about the Book of Moons — but there is something equally fascinating about the fact that this is anonymous. The only anonymous oral art form left is probably the joke.

Our changed relationship with the word has its benefits. I have found that with few exceptions I would always rather read poetry than have it read to me; I can't imagine getting much out of, for example, Rilke during a public reading. Maybe I am alone in this, but as interesting as public readings of poetry or fiction are, my own most satisfying experiences with poetry or fiction have happened when I was reading alone. "Loving Mad Tom" was made to be done out loud. I am not sure that William Carlos Williams was. Not that we can no longer meet his poetry that way; I wonder, though, if most poetry is written, even unconsciously, with the page in mind more than the air into which words are spoken.

One consequence of losing a sense of the word as something which contains inherent power — or magic, if you will — is that we regard words as things we use to convey information or to change, even manipulate, opinion. But to manipulate words means that their power is not really appreciated, and because the power is there, because words carry us more than we know, there may be unfortunate consequences for those who violate them. In any case, what has been described as a general loss of reverence and a sense of the sacred in our time could, in part, be traced to our distance from the word as a source of power. When you see children gathered without adults, playing games or huddled for some reason you can't fathom, don't assume they are doing something frivolous. If they are lucky they are, certainly without realizing it, the priests and priestesses of a nearly dead religion, one which matters very much.

JOHN GARVEY

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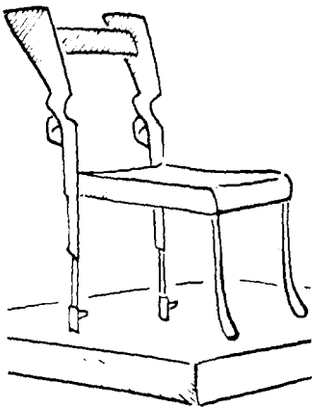

Guatemala: a new form of totalitarianism?

GORDON L. BOWEN

Everything is in the State, and nothing human or spiritual exists, much less has value outside of the State . . . Outside the State there can be neither individuals nor groups.

Benito Mussolini, 1932

A TOTAL GOVERNMENT is one in which all social relations are controlled and politicized; free presses, churches, and educational institutions wither and die. U.S. strategy is said to be aiming to prevent this in Central America. It was largely with the Central American context in mind that Jeane Kirkpatrick made the distinction between totalitarian governments and traditional autocratic, or authoritarian, ones. The practical purpose of the distinction was to steel American citizens and elites to supporting otherwise unpalatable regimes against overthrow by revolutionaries. Although Kirkpatrick's dichotomy, an important intellectual prop of administration foreign policy, has been subjected to many criticisms, none could be more concrete than the example of Guatemala, where tactics of repression have brought into existence what qualifies as a new form of totalitarian government. Without a single Nicaraguan or Cuban military unit becoming involved, without subjection to an all-encompassing Marxist-Leninist doctrine, Guatemala is nonetheless a land where the state, through terrorism, looms over all that is "human or spiritual."

Perceiving the reality of Guatemala need not be a foggy blur of Orwellian doublespeak. This oil- and mineral-rich nation desperately needs to develop its human resources through education, yet educators keep getting assassinated. Why are Guatemalans blowing their brains out? When did killing teachers become part of the defense of the Free World? Indeed, Guatemalan violence once gave birth to the term which most exactly shows the method of total social control: "the disappearance." Taken from the name of a mid-1960s human rights group, the Committee of Relatives of the Disappeared, the tactic of government-directed "disappearances" has become a chillingly effective tool. Exceptional individuals, group leaders, through Argentina's "dirty war," to El Salvador's "death squads," Guatemala's brand of state-run terrorism has inspired others to excess. In scale, it has been dwarfed by its larger cousins (i.e., Brazil) with their larger numbers of zealots, but never has it been exceeded in cruel ferocity. In Guatemala, "the disappeared" quite often reappear — as corpses bearing the marks of mutilation and torture.

The process of social control behind a government strategy of "disappearances" is disarmingly simple. When opposition leaders vanish, their colleagues and followers are prodded to cower, to take flight, lest they, too, "disappear." Targeted in this manner, unions, church cooperatives, and opposition political parties are deprived of their "brains." They become, in effect, lobotomized. Organizations deprived of their natural leaders suffer further from subsequent officially-targeted "disappearances" of the leaders' replacements. Recruitment stalls. Organized, legal opposition activity wanes as the social will to engage in it atrophies. Rather than become unarmed targets for future "disappearance," potential leaders quite reasonably come to view clandestine opposition activity as a more reasonable personal response. The growth of less visible, clandestine opposition organizations — a byproduct of the ruling tactics of the governing state terrorists — then lends an air of plausibility to additional, but more random, repression.

The combined effect of several years of targeted "disappearances," then generalized repression, is to induce periodic respites in social and political mobilization of the opposition. Accordingly, a period of multifaceted carnage (1966-71) in Guatemala, gave rise to a short period in which the number of casualties from state terrorism fell somewhat, 1972-1977. In that brief hiatus of apparent social-political order, independent organizations began to appear. Their leaders, again, became targets in the next cycle of "disappearances," 1978-1981. Subsequent ferocious and sweeping counterinsurgency operations, 1981-1983, appear to have brought the cycle near completion once more.

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Behind the apparently extraordinary excesses implicit in government use of the tactic of "disappearances" lies a continuing strategy, one that sustains the continuous influence of the extant beneficiaries within the system. The "disappearance" has become as central to the continuing primacy of the leading institution (the Guatemalan Armed Forces) as the ever available labor camp "Gulag Archipelago" is to the Soviet Communist Party in its "mature" form of totalitarianism. The specter of the "disappearance" is not episodic, nor transient, nor optional. Its shadow is not unique to the flawed character of a particular state leader, or leaders. It is not even a chosen alternative among other approaches. As Hannah Arendt saw thirty years ago, arbitrary terror is a structural pillar of these regimes. It is of the essence, a feature which at first assists in the creation of the modern totalitarian state and later sustains evolution toward an ever more totally controlled society. As the totalitarian state matures, cycles of terror must periodically recur.

Yet, in each cycle the growing social awareness of the lethal cycle diminishes the number of clear, opposition-linked, political targets. Social "learning" has occurred. Since the primary function of opposition figures "disappearing" always aims at better control over *others'* behavior, this chilling dynamic must therefore be reestablished even if it is necessary to find some other human flotsam. It is to fill this need, and in this light, that the apparently irrational, apparently secondary, repression of other social leaders — those well beyond anything approaching an organized political opposition — can be understood.

MANY HAVE FALLEN in the current cycle of violence: labor leaders, attorneys, missionaries, priests, and more. A comprehensive catalog in each profession must remain beyond our scope here. But one pointed review of the kindred travails of educators in Guatemala will help us both to know this larger process and to measure one barrier to future educational progress there. Repression of educators in Guatemala has been profession-wide, a plague that has menaced all educators, not just leftists, with the shadow of the "disappearance." In October 1983, two employees of U.S.-sponsored projects (Felipe Ralac Xioloj, a linguist, and Julieta Esperanza Sanchez Castillo, an administrator) vanished. As with all "disappearances," the current government of Gen. Oscar Humberto Mejîa Victores has denied any involvement. These claims lack credibility: in February 1983, as Defense Minister (prior to seizing power in August 1983), Gen Mejîa himself heatedly denied any army involvement in the "disappearance" of anthropologist-linguist Patricio Ortiz Maldonado and three companions. Ortiz Maldonado was an employee of Interamerica, Inc., a firm under contract with U.S.A.I.D. to teach illiterate Indians. Weeks later, in March 1983, the Defense Ministry admitted that Ortiz and friends in fact had been detained by its forces; for four days they equally vehemently maintained that the four had "escaped." Confronted by the discovery of their corpses, the Defense Ministry finally admitted that the army, in fact, had killed all four.

Clearly, even U.S.-connected educators have been far from immune from recent, targeted repression. However, their plight has been no worse than that of the personnel of the nation's major public university, the University of San Carlos (U.S.C.) in Guatemala City. Founded in 1676 and accorded legal autonomy under several now-suspended Constitutions, U.S.C. professors and students regularly have been served up as toys to be torn apart by the latter-day Torquemadas of the Guatemalan military. In October 1978, shortly after the publication of a "death list" naming (among others) twenty-three academics as targets, the military's Education Minister declared that the country could "do without" teachers who "agitate." With the green light given, waves of anti-academic violence then began. Twelve professors and thirty-eight students were dead by May 1979. Amnesty International found 1980 to be even more shocking: twenty-seven professors and seventy-one students "disappeared" or were assassinated that year. Oxfam America, as well as other reputable international human rights groups, reported the brazen broad daylight methods involved in these officially-directed killings. The editor of U.S.C.'s student newspaper, for example, was dragged from the campus cafeteria and shot in front of dozens of eyewitnesses. University rectors and deans vanished just as ignominiously. On November 26, 1983 U.S.C. Rector Raul Leonel Carrillo Reeves was shot as he disembarked from his automobile on campus. Moreover, in mid 1983, thirty-four professors were missing and presumed dead.

The circumstances surrounding two of these more recent outrages underline the well-documented claim of Amnesty International, Americas Watch and others that these "disappearances" at the universities form part of a "government program of political murder" and are not part of some feud among warring civilians. In September 1982, uniformed officials, presumably in the employ of the armed forces, carted off (i.e., looted) the household belongings of the Treasurer of the Economics Department (Sra. Graciela Morales Herrera). The preceding day, she, her two teenaged daughters and her son had been abducted by "unknown" gunmen. In 1983, Guatemalan authorities were confronted with these facts by the OAS's InterAmerican Commission on Human Rights. An oral reply was given by the (then) Defense Minister, Gen. Mejia, who now is Chief of State. At first, Mejia denied any official responsibility, but later in the interview he sought to justify the crime by stating that she was the spouse of a "known subversive."

In another recent case, in January 1983, Amnesty International presented detailed evidence of the complicity of official security forces in the abduction of History Professor Rolando Enrique Medina, including the automobile license numbers of the vehicles used to kidnap him. No arrests have occurred in any of these cases; rather, all military personnel have been pardoned in advance for any crimes committed!

Grade school educators in great numbers may one day be needed for Guatemala to develop its human resources. According to the O.A.S., in the late 1970s, among the population aged ten years and older half are illiterate; among the Indian

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minorities, more than three-fourths cannot read and write. The day on which those sorry statistics are improved becomes ever more distant with each "disappearance." Amnesty International documented fifty-three cases of official assassination of schoolteachers in 1980 — many conducted in front of the students. The Guatemala City daily *La Prensa Libre* detailed seventy-five others in the first five months of 1981. Oxfam America reported in 1982 that one development worker confided to them that *all* graduates of his training courses were in exile after the 1979-82 targeted violence, or were, like eighty-two of his graduates, killed in the violence. Many former teachers now are refugees.

The social impact of this targeted repression mirrors the social impact of the violence, 1966-71. A 1981 letter from one missionary teacher captures a sense of the draconian chill these cycles of violence create: "My arrival in Huehuetenango coincided with the 'disappearance' of two young Indian teachers. . . . Some of the Indian parents have asked what sense does it make to have their boys and girls receive an education if it only marks them for assassination? What a terrible situation for these poor people. I think the main 'crime' of those who have died is that they managed to get an education. They were not political but they must have been seen as possible threats for the future."

THAT CHILL still hangs over the "Land of Eternal Spring," as the tourist brochures would have us see the nation. "Disappearing" politicians, then unionists and priests, then teachers, all appear essential to a military regime bent on complete immobilization of society. Periodic lulls, momentary respites in the violence also appear to be a necessary part of the cycle. Violence in Guatemala wanes not due to periodic "strategic retreats" by guerrillas who disrupt an otherwise stable social order. Rather, violence in Guatemala wanes because it is functional to the totalitarian order which creates the violence. Internally, respites serve the interests of state officials by enabling them to identify the next generation of bona fide social and political leaders. They then become targets for the future. Unendingly intense state terrorism would not allow this identification to take place as efficiently.

Moreover, unending violence would poorly serve the foreign policy objectives of this totalitarian state. It is vital that there appear to be periodic improvements in state protection of human rights. During these calm moments, the up side of this grisly cycle, an opportunity is provided for the principal power of the region, the U.S., to extend military and economic assistance. Without the persuasive pretext that the U.S. is aiding an improving situation, the balance of forces in the U.S. Congress tends to favor continuation of the arms embargo that was imposed, 1977-1981, as a result of Congressional findings that the Guatemalan military ruled through a pattern of gross human rights violations. Slackening rates of "disappearances," then, are an important part of the way that the whole cycle of violence serves the foreign policy objectives of the state. Once buttressed by aid and arms, there is little incentive to discontinue this cycle of state terrorism.

Cycles of "disappearances" thus have proven to be functional to the internal and external objectives of the rulers of the Guatemalan state. In the short run it may be argued with some plausibility, as the Kissinger Commission recently has, that an alliance with these state terrorists can yield some advantage to the U.S. in our efforts to retard the growth of anti-U.S. guerrilla movements in Guatemala and in neighboring El Salvador. The 1983 killings of employees of U.S.A.I.D. projects, however, illustrate that there are some limits to the coincidence of our objectives. The U.S. has long-term interests in the region which require the continuing support of the U.S. people behind the tactics used to secure our interests. Those interests flow from the long-run objectives of the U.S.: securing U.S. and allied oil supplies; and denying to the Soviet Union regional, and ultimately global, supremacy. Being a democracy, the U.S. ability to persevere toward these ends depends upon our leaders' ability to convey to our adversaries the perception that the U.S. people will bear willingly the costs involved.

Unless my estimation of the American people is quite confused, the Guatemalan reality cannot willingly be accommodated as a necessary evil. Must we who are educated as to the nature of this situation now commit some sort of autolobotomy? How else can American educators let this grim cycle disappear from consciousness? How else can American officials spurn our own "disappearing" employees? The time may soon come to confront what the true costs are of standing shoulder to shoulder into the indefinite future with the regime, as the Reagan administration now asks us to do. An educated society such as ours may itself be torn asunder at its most basic moral foundations if it is asked to accept the necessity of perpetual cycles of murder of teachers and priests by such "friends." Such consorting may require that we pay a far higher cost than present billing suggests. What is the cost to America for forsaking our national ethos?

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THREE GOVERNMENTS WOULD LIKE THE REFUGEES GONE

Thorn in the flesh

ISABEL ROGERS

THREE GOVERNMENTS would like to see the Guatemalan refugee problem "disappear": Mexico, because the more than one hundred thousand refugees who have crossed the border into Chiapas have caused a social and political headache for that country; Guatemala itself, since the refugees' insistence that it is not safe for them to return does not support the government's claim that human rights abuses have decreased; and thirdly, the United States, since the Reagan administration needs the image of a non-repressive government of Guatemala in order to resume military aid.

But the refugees continue to pour across the border with Mexico at the rate of several hundred families a month. What is happening in Guatemala? According to the lack of news in the press, it would appear that "nothing newsworthy" is occurring, apart from the most recent coup last August which replaced the "born-again" military president, Rios Montt, with another general, Mejía Victores. But the army continues in power, as it has for the last thirty years, since the U.S.-supported coup that overthrew democratically elected President Arbenz.

After spending a couple of weeks in Guatemala last summer, I was able to visit the refugee settlements inside Mexico. I talked to Guatemalans both "inside" and "outside." The stories are almost beyond belief — massacres of whole Indian communities, torture, and disappearances, causing people to flee for their lives.

But something even more diabolical is occurring. Under the Lucas Garcia regime (ousted in March 1982) when repression was increasing, the government strategy was to kill off the leaders of mass organizations — union leaders, peasants, students, intellectuals, and the priests and religious who supported them. Rios Montt promised to "clean up" these brutal killings. His tactic was not so much to concentrate on the leaders but on the "people" who were "supporting subversive action." Massacres of whole villages continued to occur with the accusation that the people were "supporting the guerrillas."

The streets of Guatemala City and the larger towns are no longer the scene of brutal hit-and-run murders by men with machine guns who drive by, shoot down their victim and leave the body lying there. Therefore, the country is again pronounced "safe" for tourists and the middle class. However, those who are continuing to be slaughtered are Indians living in isolated, mountainous communities, heavily patrolled by the army, with no word getting to the outside world. Foreign journalists' freedom to move about is severely restricted, and it is almost impossible to file a report through the government Telephone and Telegraph Company.

But the refugees — the "thorn in the flesh" of the Guatemalan government — keep flooding into Mexico with tales of horror almost beyond human imagination.

Yet even this kind of massacre of the poor peasants in isolated communities has not proved sufficient for the government in stamping out "subversion."

Killing leaders did not seem to work. Because of the Indians' centuries-old tradition of community support and decision-making, when one of their leaders was killed, they simply named another. This was particularly evident in the structure of the rural church. Often priests could only reach isolated communities once every few months; therefore, people relied on their own resources, training catechists and "delegates of the Word" to carry on their religious life together. The Indians' sense of community was their biggest strength in organizing to confront their historical exploitation. It was the biggest threat to the government in keeping everything "under the control" of the minority wealthy and military, as it had always been.

The latest and most diabolical plan therefore is to break the Indians' sense of community and to create division and enmity among them. How was this to be done? The government has organized "civilian patrols" — these are formed by "voluntary" groups of men from each village whose duty it is to patrol their area and to guard against the guerrillas. What is really happening is that the army is using these civilian patrols to carry out massacres of neighboring villages. The patrol is told: "A certain village is supporting the guerrillas — we leave it up to you what to do." They know that either they have to go and massacre their neighbors or they too will be killed. The government is also giving the land of those who have fled to other Indians, knowing that is a sacred travesty of the Indians' link to their land.

In Guatemala, I learned of the situation of the one million refugees *inside* the country. I talked at length with two gentle-

ISABEL ROGERS *is the pseudonym of a writer who must remain anonymous to protect her sources.*

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looking Guatemalan nuns who were working at great risk with these refugees. The government does not recognize the category of "refugees" within the country, and all displaced persons are looked upon as possibly associated with subversive groups. This is a population in dire physical and psychological conditions — they move constantly out of fear of having their papers checked by the security forces; they are afraid to apply for a new identity card, since the fact that they are from conflictive zones makes them suspect. They cannot find work, their children are undernourished and do not go to school. The nuns told me: "The atmosphere of the city is destroying them. In the country they have skills and understand the land. Here they do not understand anything. Their culture and identity have been taken from them."

One possible source of meager income could be from the sale of their weavings. The women set up their portable looms and continue to produce the beautiful, traditional weavings for which Guatemala is famous. Small or large amounts of these handcrafts can be sent to solidarity groups for fund-raising or information purposes.

IN MEXICO, I traveled to the southern state of Chiapas and was able to visit a Guatemalan refugee settlement, a home for refugee children with severe malnutrition, and to talk with a number of church people working with the refugees. It is not easy to visit the refugee areas. The Mexican immigration officials and the security police turn back visitors saying that this is not a tourist area. I was able to obtain letters of introduction through the Coordinating Committee for Guatemalan Refugees in Mexico City to the church people in San Cristobal de las Casas. I was told: "Follow their advice — we do not know whether you will be allowed into the settlements." In San Cristobal I was warmly received by the courageous group of priests, nuns, and lay people who are working with the refugees, under the leadership of the bishop — one of the few bishops of Mexico to have braved threats and harassment for taking a stand with the poor. That same day, a young professor had been kidnapped by the security police. She had been accused of taking foreign journalists to visit the refugee settlements. I was told: "Chiapas is like Central America . . . Here there is a majority Indian population, exploited for centuries by the big landowners." However, many poor Mexican families living near the border have accepted the Guatemalan refugees into their houses, shared their land and helped them with their meager resources. They feel the same identity as Indians and are learning of the horrors of the massacres inside Guatemala. They are also learning about the Guatemalans' courage in organizing themselves to confront exploitation and about their deep, renewed faith which is leading them to say: "Enough!"

By chance, a Mexican doctor and social worker (no foreigners are allowed to work with the refugees) from the Lake District area came into town that evening and offered to give me a ride to the settlement the next day. Traveling with them would reduce the chances of being turned back, since the guards knew them and their jeep. The next morning, I took a two-hour bus ride through incredibly beautiful mountain scenery to the town of Comitán, halfway to the settlement area, and contacted the team of doctors at the local hospital. This is an extraordinary group of physicians: "Sickness has many causes; the main one is hunger. We cannot just sit in the hospital and wait for the patients to come. We also go out to the villages and help the people with their agricultural projects." They have taken on the unexpected burden of the refugees flooding into their area and they go out in teams to the settlements. The pediatrician started a home for severely malnourished Guatemalan children when the problem of so many children lying about waiting on the hospital floors became unbearable. I was taken to see the home, which is run by the wife of one of the doctors and an exiled doctor from Uruguay, Doctora Mari. The building is loaned by a religious order. They have now received aid from UNICEF and other international groups (mostly from Europe, none from the U.S.) and can treat up to 100 children. They have only half that number because it is difficult to get the parents to give permission for their children to be taken away for treatment. The families cannot visit them because they are not allowed out of the settlements. However, parents finally agree when the child reaches second or third degree malnutrition and can only lie listlessly with little sign of life. All the children also have other serious conditions like pneumonia, anemia, diarrhea and tuberculosis. I have never seen children so terribly affected, with bloated stomachs, emaciated limbs, loss of hair and sometimes eyesight, others with swollen legs barely able to walk. "They come to us after the family has been fleeing and hiding out in the mountains of Guatemala for months, eating only roots, before they finally cross the border. Here in Mexico they are receiving basic foodstuffs, but for many of the children it is too late." I asked about permanent brain damage. They said, "We do not know yet." They showed me some children who had improved after several months' treatment and I was encouraged by their loving concern. The children speak no Spanish and come from four different Indian groups speaking different languages. Two Guatemalan mothers were working as cooks and to help with communication. One uncovered the baby on her back. An emaciated, wizened, old-man's face appeared, a child of one year weighing only a few pounds.

THE DOCTOR and social worker picked me up at the prearranged spot on the highway and we drove another couple of hours in the evening light to a border village which has received 300 Guatemalan families. I concealed my camera but the border patrols waved the doctor's jeep through. The village is on the edge of one of the scenic lakes of what used to be a wilderness tourist spot. The small lodge offered a bunk bed in a common dormitory and breakfast. It was dark when we arrived and I awoke in the grey dawn to the beautiful sight of the lake and surrounding hills. I walked over to the simple wooden house where the priest, doctor, and social worker lived, and they talked to me about the situation. The border is only 500 yards away. We walked up a steep hill to look at its white concrete markers. A long continuous swath had been cut out of

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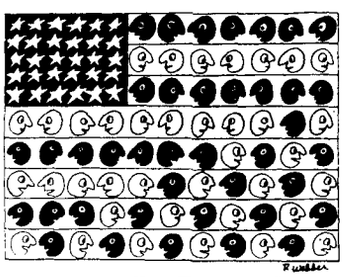
the forest to mark the boundary line between the two countries. On the Mexican side the trees were thick, but on the Guatemalan side they had been chopped down to make it easier to spot the refugees as they made their last dash to safety.

I was taken to visit the sewing class — Mexican villages and Guatemalans learning how to use sewing machines to make clothing. They told their stories of fleeing the military after the San Francisco massacre near their village. They fled as whole families and villages, and have been allowed to stay together. Later the doctor took me on his rounds and to visit a special family. He told me: "Most of the 100,000 refugees in the area have had *no* contact with western medicine. They resist vaccination and are suspicious of drugs and treatments." This young doctor was giving his services voluntarily. He had worked in Nicaragua with the Sandinistas during the 1979 final offensive, and later with the Salvadoran guerrillas, but felt he should return and give assistance to his own country in an area of desperate need.

He then took me to the house of one family — two brothers, their wives and children, a sister and the sixty-seven-year-old mother. They had fled together from one of the most severely repressed areas of Huehuetenango. What tremendous qualities of courage, creativity, and leadership were apparent in this small representative group. With little formal education, one brother was teaching tailoring, the other was learning to be a health promoter. The mother, with the dignity of her years, spoke of the flight. The women kept the simple bamboo house swept and neat and offered us thick tortillas, patted by hand and baked on the low wood fire. They all spoke of hope and faith that one day they would return to rebuild a more just society in Guatemala. As we talked, suddenly they were tense and listening: "the helicopter." I could not hear anything, but their oversensitized ears had caught the low hum. We ran out and stood under the cover of a tree looking across the small hillock to the border 500 yards away. A low mist hung over the higher hill which marked the boundary line and by now you could hear the muffled sound of the engine of the Guatemalan military plane as it flew along the dividing line, attempting to sow panic and terror among the refugees. For several months, the incidents involving Guatemalan soldiers actually entering refugee camps and capturing or killing people had been reduced, but people continue to live in fear.

The noise subsided and I walked back through the village to wait on the dusty roadside for the rare, ramshackle bus (it came two hours later) to take me back to Comitán, followed by another two-hour ride to San Cristobal. I sat and chatted with the people waiting for the bus, mostly women with their children and bundles, and I observed the Mexicans and Guatemalans obviously getting along together. We in the U.S. cannot offer the Guatemalan refugees the simple hospitality of the Mexican homes or share a plot of land, but we can offer our support by speaking out and insisting that Washington not renew military aid or support the government of Guatemala that is causing its people to flee their homeland in terror.

SHARING A WORLD THAT JIM CROW KEPT APART



The gift of Alvin White

LAWRENCE D. HOGAN

THE FILM CRITIC, Stanley Kauffmann, in an acerbic review of the Oscar-winning *On Golden Pond*, comments on the acting of the aging Frederic March in *The Iceman Cometh*. March presumably knew it was his last performance. "To his credit," and in Kauffmann's opinion unlike the performance of Henry Fonda in *On Golden Pond*, March "didn't trade on the fact of his age; he acted in a good role for which he was now the right age."

I have a friend. His name is Alvin White. For the better part of sixty years he has earned his living as a newspaper reporter and free-lance writer. This summer he celebrated his eighty-eighth birthday in a nursing home he calls Gehenna in a state he refers to as Gawga. Al has never been a man to hold in his opinions.

His voice first came to me eight years ago from an upstairs apartment in his daughter and son-in-law's home in Worcester, Massachusetts. Alvin White was responding to an inquiry from an aspiring Ph.D candidate who wanted to know what it had been like being a black reporter for the Associated Negro Press, the leading news agency of its day. That was a day — the 1920s through the 1950s—that, according to Gunnar Myrdal, the Swedish sociologist and student of American race relations, saw the black press as the "greatest single power in the Negro race." The eager researcher on the road to his degree got more than he bargained for — and he is still getting.

Al White has been staging a play for me through eight years of a rich, rewarding correspondence. It is a drama filled with

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fascinating scenes and characters, with voices from a past that in recent years we have begun to pay attention to and appreciate in new ways. Every year we designate one month, February, as Black History Month. Some call it Black Awareness Month. History and awareness are what Al White is about. Through six decades he has been reporting and making the one by being the other.

The journey he takes me on is as rich and varied as the life he has led. A short time ago he had me back to 1907. That was one year after the great educator, scholar, and activist W.E.B. DuBois saw displayed next to the chopped beef and red steaks in the window of a butcher's market in Atlanta the fingers of a freshly lynched black sharecropper. DuBois tells us it was that sight as much as anything that turned him from student and scholar of the Black American experience to committed racial activist and propagandist. Al White has us in that year of 1907 witnessing an unusual occurrence, an odd scene. Here is the president of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt, alighting from his carriage on a visit to Richmond in connection with the Virginia Tercentenary Exhibition, walking to the front door of the office of an ex-slave who was the first black admitted to practice law before the Virginia Supreme Court, and announcing in a loud voice that he wished to see Mr. Jackson. Colonel Giles Beecher Jackson (the title had been conferred by President McKinley) had conceived and engineered through the Congress of the United States a major appropriation for the erection of a Negro Pavilion at the Tercentenary Exhibition. The district in Richmond known as Jackson's Ward proudly bears the name of the man Theodore Roosevelt singled out as worthy of presidential attention.

A more recent letter moves the Richmond of Giles Jackson, and of Alvin White's youth, into the Harlem of the 1930s in the persons of semi-pro football players who were part of the epic migration that changed the face of Black America from rural to urban. Let Al tell the story:

> Now fussball, as the Germans would say. In 1926 the All Southern Collegians came into being. The nucleus of that team had been tops in black football. Where? Richmond of course. They were an athletic arm of a social club, the Adelphia Social Club, and the footballers were called the A.S.C. For diverse and sundry reasons, this tight little corps left Richmond and came to Harlem where I was already with the *New York News*. Chafing from inactivity, they sent an emissary to talk me into taking charge and fielding a team, hoping to continue as the old A.S.C. outfit. Well that title was hardly suitable, so I decided to use the initials substituting All Southern Collegians for the original Adelphia Social Club. Our very first game, a guarantee of $150, was against the Third Ward Pros of Paterson, New Jersey. That town was always a good sports town, the Paterson Silk Sox being a top white semi-pro baseball team that sent two men, brothers, Claude and Bubber Jonnard, to the majors. The other top team was the Bushwicks, out on Long Island close to Brooklyn. On weekends when the Bushwicks played the Black Homestead Grays or some other good team of blacks they outdrew the Dodgers — which was one motivation for Branch Rickey's move — besides his alleged recognition of blacks as human beings and not clowns.

In one paragraph we have moved through an important chapter of Southern history, into the Harlem of the great northern migration of blacks, and bowed in the direction of the social experiment conducted by Branch Rickey and Jackie Robinson that changed the face of American sports. I have come to recognize this as a typical Al White journey.

AL WHITE has made his life into a rich journey that allows him to fill his stage with a delightfully varied and marvelously drawn set of players, most of whom lived their lives behind the veil that has for so long separated black from white America. The range of characters he parades before us is extraordinary.

The scenery in another act is President and Mrs. Roosevelt's laundry strung out to dry in the back yard next to 1445 T Street where a close friend of Al's lived. Delivered by the secret service to a special laundress and ironed to the perfection that only the first family's white tailored monogrammed shirts and expensive silk undergarments could command, this scene was part of a well established routine. It would only change with FDR's untimely death. The secret service, failing to take into account the easily offended dignity of the proud colored laundress, were brought up short by her curt remark on the arrival of the first load of Truman wear. "I don't do cheap stuff like this," she exclaimed, and back it went to the White House into the regular wash.

Moments more sublime. Marian Anderson, Al's all-time favorite, with a voice Toscanini described as coming once in a lifetime, making her Easter Sunday TV debut on the Ed Sullivan Show, and holding cast, technicians, and the M.C. himself enthralled during a rehearsal as she quietly entered the theater, moved down the aisle to the pit, talked for a moment with the orchestra leader, Ray Block, and began singing "He's Got the Whole World In His Hands."

Al White is, in effect, writing a play that is meant to straighten out a record too often filled with misjudgments and absences and distortions:

- His lawyer's brief defending the actor Stepin Fetchit against those critics who fail to see that he and his fellow thespians "took what was offered, and their portrayals were often forced over caricatures."
- A portrait of "dignity personified," Dr. Carter G Woodson, the father of black history in the twentieth century, whose high standards, accompanied by warmth toward his students, contrast with "present day pygmies who now glory in the production of the giants."
- A history maker in a different field, Bob Douglas, sports promoter extraordinary and founder of the famed Harlem Renaissance Five, "When you mention Bob Douglas you tap another giant. When Joe Lapchick was coach of the New York Knickerbockers he told me Bob had the teams but Abe Saper-

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Alvin White and Roy Campanella, Norman "Chief" Cobb, and Don Newcombe in the Brooklyn Dodgers' dugout.

stein (who started the Harlem Globetrotters) made the money."

• Old time professional baseball greats such as the "consensus great of all, John Henry Pops Lloyd," and pitchers like Cannonball Dick Redding and Smoky Joe Williams, who are largely unknown, and excluded from the Hall of Fame at Cooperstown because of the arbitrary admission date set by those who vote on entrance.

Special voices jump out from Al White's stage. Listen to the extraordinary black orator, Roscoe Conklin Simmons, who was a power, to the degree there could be such, in national Republican party circles during the early part of the century. "He was an old-fashioned eloquent orator who strutted, postured, asked the audience questions — and when he turned around and said scornfully, 'Sirs, I give you this,' you were ready to stand up and sing the 'Star Spangled Banner' in deepest and darkest Dixie, which is where I heard him in 1915 when Villa was giving the U.S. an unmitigated headache."

And the special places this "playwright" has been — for instance the storied Harlem of the 1920s and 1930s. We have been there before, but somehow we missed what Al White saw. A Cotton Club, for instance, that was a front for a massive beer running operation, and a showcase for black entertainers, but typically supportive of the racial status quo in closing its doors to the patronage of Harlem's black residents, even when they had the status of a W.C. Handy whose music could enter though he could not.

This Harlem that Al White lived in was much more than an entertainment oasis where whites could enjoy a quality of music found nowhere else. It was also the northeast corner of 135th Street and 7th Avenue where Southern collegians, with time off from summer jobs as bellhops and waiters on overnight steamships to Boston or Albany, or from hustling bags at Grand Central and Pennsylvania stations, would gather to "shoot the breeze" and plan for their return to school. And Harlem was 116th Street and Park Avenue at the international market of an international community with foreign born blacks — "British, French, Dutch, Danish, Spanish, and even a few Swedes" — proud of the separate heritages they brought with them from the islands, and celebrating, of all things, Queen Wilhelmina's or Juliana's birthday, or singing the "Marseillaise" on Bastille Day.

Straightening the record is what Al White's play is about — seizing opportunities, whenever they present themselves, to reach out to an audience that needs to know what this man knows. Thus most recently a typical feature article with the Al White byline, carried by the *Worcester Evening Gazette* in the aftermath of Ingrid Bergman's death, recalled for film buffs the career of Dooley Wilson, who as Sam sang the poignant *As Time Goes By* for Bergman and Humphrey Bogart in the film classic, *Casablanca*. Wilson, Al tells us, "like so many other talented blacks of that era, unfortunately, was ahead of his time." And as always, to give the man his due, there's a reference to the historical record, for Dooley Wilson was, as we are reminded by Al White who knows whatof he speaks, an original member in 1915 of "the most talented and versatile group of black actors ever assembled," the famous Lafayette Players.

DOOLEY WILSON crooning "A kiss is but a kiss, a sigh is but a sigh"; Marian Anderson holding a theater spellbound; a Harlem rich in ways we seldom hear about; and individuals of extraordinary achievement who are not found in the standard history books. What does all this recollecting mean? What is Al White giving us?

For me the answer is very direct — something I am fre-

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quently conscious of. When I talk with my students about the decade of the 1890s and the imposition throughout the South by state legislation of an institutionalized system of Jim Crow, I think about the stupidity involved in denying society the enriching contact it should and could have had with the talented black Richmond that produced Alvin White. When I try to convey to these same students a meaningful picture of the world war we entered in 1917 to make the world safe for democracy, I think about what Al has told me of his work as a stevedore in a labor battalion in France, and about the race riot he witnessed in that same France where so much American blood had been shed in the war to end all wars. It was white American soldiers fighting black American soldiers on that April in 1919 when Christians were commemorating the resurrection of the Prince of Peace. Whenever I ponder as an historian the meaning of Woodrow Wilson's New Freedom; and of the New Deal, Fair Deal, New Frontier, and Great Society of Wilson's White House successors; and more recently of Richard Nixon's New Federalism, and of Ronald Reagan's truly new federalism — anything last practiced in this country during the administration of Calvin Coolidge deserves to be called new — I find myself reminded of one thing or another Al has written on one of the hundreds of pages of correspondence through which he has shared with me the rich experience of a long life well lived.

More importantly, when I think about the dignity and presence of a Marian Anderson, the voice and witness of a Paul Robeson, the courage of a Roy Wilkins or a Martin Luther King, the skill at bat and grace a field of a John Lloyd, the coaching and promoting skills of a Bob Douglas, and the names of countless other Black Americans, no less deserving of accolades, whom I would not know if it were not for Al, the picture I have is shaped by a gift to me of a world that as a society we know too little of, and would benefit so greatly by knowing so much better. I can only be thankful that this eighty-eight-year-old history-maker, reporter, and record straightener has chosen to share his world with me, and can only be conscious of an obligation I have to share it with my children, and with all the young people who come through my classroom.

Fairleigh Dickinson University Press will publish this year a book titled *A Black National News Service: Claude Barnett and the Associated Negro Press, 1919-1945*. The dedication page will read, to the three who count the most, Sally, Rebecca, and Matthew; to Mom and Dad who gave me the eyes to see them; and my friend, Alvin White, an extraordinary journalist. As usual, Al has a comment. "I am flattered no end by your compliment in including me in the dedication as an extraordinary journalist. But as usual I have a second opinion. It occurs to me that reversing the words to read journalist extraordinary sounds better. Nuts. That's nitpicking. Anyhow, thanks."

What did Stanley Kauffmann say about Frederic March? He was a professional right to the end. "He didn't trade on the fact of his age; he acted in a good role for which he was now the right age."

Screen

TOUCHING THE HEM

LOST HOPES & FALLEN LEADERS

SEVERAL YEARS AGO a fellow teacher told me about a question asked in her political science class. It was the kind of student question that makes professors cringe at first, but which they somehow never tire of repeating at faculty coffee klatch reviews of the decline and fall of general intelligence. She told me that when she had once mentioned the Kennedy administration she saw a hand go up. "Excuse me," a student said, "but are we responsible for American history in this class?"

Last fall's movies have indicated that the irony was not on the student but the teachers, particularly those in the thirty-to-forty age group whose narcissism has for so long sustained a feeling of being above history. The most important political factor on screen this fall was not the portrayal of John Glenn in *The Right Stuff* or the fuss over the TV movie *The Day After*. The main political event of the fall was richer but simpler: sixties nostalgia.

Maybe it had to happen, one of those predictable cyclic turns in American fashion and faddism. A few years ago we waxed nostalgic for the fifties, with resurrected hula hoops, fascination with early rock and roll, slicked back hair, and the simplicities of an older vision of America which Ronald Reagan evoked and fed. But now the media is dominated by a different set of memories, based on the sixties, and the early seventies, the very time we were formerly fleeing. On public TV we have had the massive documentary of the Vietnam War; in films, *The Big Chill, The Right Stuff*, and even, replaying their campus tour, G. Gordon Liddy and Timothy Leary in the documentary *Return Engagement*. On commercial TV we have had a most momentous return engagement: the three-part, six-hour NBC "Kennedy" marking the twentieth anniversary of the assassination. Was it imagination, or wasn't that milestone marked by far more observance and nostalgia than the tenth?

Why? The simple answer is time. As in the past — say with the Great War Novels of World War One — it takes more than a decade to get perspective on events, to evaluate what really happened. In addition, it may be that the people who grew up in the Kennedy and Vietnam War years are now in positions of power in the movie industry and are using it to reflect on their past.

But there were many political movies this fall — in addition to the nostalgic ones — *Hanna K., Silkwood, Under Fire*, and the excellent NBC treatment of the murdered American churchwomen in El Salvador, *Choices of the Heart*. Together with the films reflecting on the past, they suggest that some-

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thing more profound is going on — some longing for political commitment to counter the complacency of recent times, some hankering after a rebirth of communal spirit, some yearning for a clear line of direction and purpose at a time when international issues have become so complex and even domestic ones seem to come down to mere coping. In the nostalgic movies, the past is seen as a time not just when things were simpler, but more meaningful. Even *The Big Chill,* which looks at the past more skeptically than most other treatments, examines the earlier period with nostalgia for something — some sense, as one character puts it around a communal dinner table, that "we were better then."

The Big Chill also asks the question which haunts the nostalgia-laden films this fall. It starts with the suicide of one Alex, once a student who inspired and held together the group of friends who reconvene for his funeral. The film becomes less somber than its morbid beginning, but always addresses the question posed by an old pastor who unsuccessfully tries to understand how a thirty-or-so man could kill himself. "Where," the pastor asks pleadingly, "did Alex's hope go?"

In this respect, Alex's is hardly the only critical death in recent movies. Accidentally but appropriately, *The Big Chill* coincided with the Kennedy anniversary whose many commemorations — on TV talk programs, eulogies, documentaries, and various films — all seemed to ask the same sort of question: where did the Kennedy hope go? Of course commentators on many reviews of the Kennedy years noted that his heritage was complex, but all agreed on one thing: he inspired a great many Americans, most of them young, with a hopeful vision of the world. The NBC movie, for example, took this benign view: even admitting the Judith Exner affair, it highlighted Kennedy's hesitations about Vietnam, his (questionable) respect for Martin Luther King and animosity to J. Edgar Hoover, and his intimacy with his brother Bobby and *his* interest in civil rights. Martin Sheen's Kennedy was seen in macho terms, to be sure, but he was also martyred hope, the Kennedy who articulated the old "whig" interpretation of history as one grand march from the Magna Carta to the Declaration of Independence to the Alliance for Progress — a march, one might say, the radicals simply extended into Aquarius. The Kennedy image, in short, provided a key to the nostalgia present in *The Big Chill* — the feeling among youth not only that "we were better then" but also that "the Force" was with them. Add the media fact and infantile fantasy that "the whole world is watching" and you understand much about nostalgia for the 1960s, both good and bad.

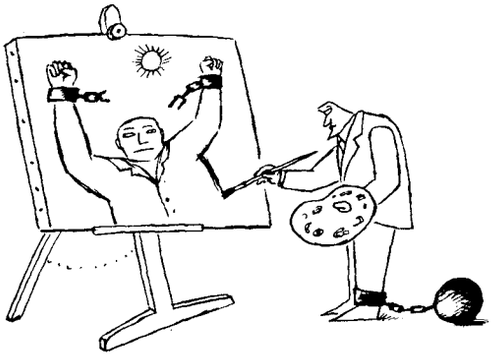
The last ten minutes of the Kennedy film were striking: they depicted the assassination, but not the funeral aftermath. Yet they were elegiac, containing almost no spoken words and documenting an exuberantly happy ride through Dallas where Kennedy seemed already cut off — not only by our foreknowledge but his silence as he waved to the crowd and smiled at his wife. The limo became his cortege into eternity. After the shots, the only scene occurred at the hospital where doctors scrambled wildly to get a heartbeat. The screenplay, in short, caught the event in all its brutal abruptness: we are left with a group of stunned figures over the body just before the (again silent) credits.

Accidentally, perhaps, but again appropriately, the Kennedy TV movie seemed to end just where *The Big Chill* begins: friends receive news of Alex's death, followed by credits flashing over his corpse which is being dressed for the funeral. In both films, the dead, once-inspiring leader is wrapped in longing and elegy. But this time the whole world isn't watching.

The Big Chill checks nostalgia with irony. The assembled friends recall college days ("when property was a crime") but go on, mostly, to discuss what has happened since, in particular where their hopes have gone. A young lawyer tells of idealistic days in Legal Aid, followed by better work with corporations; a housewife talks about her unfulfilled writing ambitions and her choice to marry an advertising executive; a young actor talks of the days he roused the campus with charismatic speeches and measures them against his TV stardom in a harem-scarum detective series. As he comments to Kevin Kline, the homeowner hosting the reunion, "Whoever would have thought of it, two revolutionaries making all this money?" "Yeah," Kline deadpans back, "it's a good thing it means nothing to us."

But even Kline — for whom life has never been better — is affectionately tied to the past: "There is no other music," he answers to complaints about the "old" sixties tunes that he keeps playing, and he prides himself in group activities. Indeed, the movie details a synthesis of "revolutionary" and bourgeois values, with Kline and his wife (a doctor played by Glenn Close) showing the way communally with their best friends. Close lends her husband to the lawyer, a single woman who wants a baby but who finds that all men are "either gay or married." Kline offers stock tips to rootless druggie William Hurt, who interprets his restlessness as a matter of still "evolving." It is Hurt's performance that brings the sixties and early seventies most alive, with his lazy drawl and cynical gestures that seem drawn from a time warp. But at the end Hurt is converted — to try to settle down at least, and to accept the bourgeois earth of South Carolina as a potential home.

CURIOUSLY, THERE IS a resonance between *The Big Chill* and a film set in the present that may seem entirely opposite, *Under Fire*. *The Big Chill* is about dropping into America; *Under Fire* about a photographer, played by Nick Nolte, who becomes radicalized during the Nicaraguan revolu-



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tion and to some degree joins it. Nolte plays a role in sustaining the revolution: he prints a picture of a revolutionary leader that the Somoza government claims is dead, but stages the shot to imply the leader is alive and well in the mountains. According to the film's implausible and unhistoric but exciting plot, the revolution succeeds because people believe the leader is still operating.

Despite the differences, there are some parallel scenes worth noting in *The Big Chill* and *Under Fire*. In both, mid-to-late thirty-year-old mothers call their daughters and tell them to behave conventionally while they themselve are engaging in unusual, even radical acts. In *The Big Chill,* after Glenn Close orders a curfew, she barks into the phone, "When *you're* a mother, you can be mean, too," then comments to her lawyer friend, "Sometimes I can't believe the things I hear myself saying." In *Under Fire*, after cautioning her child against risqué dresses, Nick Nolte's girl and writer companion takes off into the hills with him. In both movies, mothers attempt to coordinate bourgeois parenting and private rebellion, and emerge only with uneasy solutions.

But the real resemblance lies deeper. In both movies, there is a fascination with dead bodies, the corpses of the revolutionary leader. In *The Big Chill,* the movie begins with his funeral, but that finality is checked by the way his passing provokes others to measure and change themselves. In *Under Fire*, the fake photo provides hope and illusion which keep the revolution alive. In both, resurrection of the dead provides a sense of purpose or meaning or at least direction. The elaborate Kennedy anniversary and the NBC movie suggest the same thing: an urge to revive hope by touching the hem of the fallen leader.

There is one final parallel between the two movies that helps answer the question, "Where did Alex's hope go?" The parallel involves views of law and order. In *The Big Chill*, before settling down, William Hurt upbraids Kevin Kline for being too friendly with the local police. Kline screams back that the police are not pigs, as they had once thought. He recognizes the bourgeois necessity to be unliberal about crime.

In *Under Fire* the situation is not, at first glance, similar. After the revolution succeeds, Nolte does not turn an American mercenary in to the Sandinistas, although he knows the man has mercilessly killed scores of people. On one view, if he did turn the man in, he might seem a revolutionary, and therefore the opposite of Kevin Kline. But on a deeper view, regardless of the specific left-right politics, he would be the same as Kline: he would have accepted the painful reality that there is such a thing as crime, that crime ought to be punished, that any society — even a revolutionary one — needs law and order. Characteristically, Nolte turns away from the mercenary in disgust, but not enough disgust to take meaningful political action.

"Where did Alex's hope go?" As Alex's story and Nick Nolte's actions indicate, it went into compulsive anti-bourgeois gestures that meant the real world would not be changed. It went into a *style* that would not accept America as the country it was *as a way of changing it.* It went into discarding values like money, family, comfort, law and order — as if their excesses invalidated their necessity. It went into making Ronald Reagan president, but then the lesser of two evils has never been palatable to Utopians.

The realists in *The Big Chill* are hardly preferable to the doomed dreamers. But perhaps these movies demonstrate that the "party of Hope," as Emerson once characterized the optimistic strain in the American tradition, lost its way in the sixties and early seventies, leaving us with only nostalgic longing today. If *Under Fire* represents a current application of revolutionary optimism, it doesn't seem that hope, a theological virtue, has found its roots in the bourgeois soil of South Carolina. When and if it does, nostalgia has a future.

TOM O'BRIEN

(Tom O'Brien, a past contributor to Commonweal, *teaches at the Manhattan School of Music.)*

Dance

PETER MARTINS

MASTER OF OLD & NEW

THE RETIREMENT of Peter Martins from active performing is clearly a loss from the ranks of the principal dancers of New York City Ballet and from that handful of international male stars who set the standard of performance for all others. Among them are numbered Mikhail Baryshnikov, Vladimir Vasiliev, Rudolf Nureyev, and Anthony Dowell.

Dowell is totally the product of English dance training and embodies its ideals of precision, neatness, and finish. Baryshnikov and Nureyev trained with the Kirov ballet and, despite their decision to work in the West, sustain the clarity, openness, and dramatic vigor of their early schooling. Vasiliev, who is the leading male dancer of the Bolshoi Ballet, maintains the brio and heroic attack of the Moscow school. All are superb exemplars of their individual traditions. Martins alone is something of a maverick.

He began his training in the Royal Danish Ballet School in Copenhagen. He graduated into the company with a reputation of being a vaguely discontented individual with exceptional technical gifts. The system of training which formed him was essentially that of August Bournonville the great Danish nineteenth-century dancer, choreographer, and ballet master.

In addition to creating the body of work that remains the special heritage of the Royal Danish Ballet, Bournonville also designed the basic pedagogy that governs the training of dancers in the school. His rule of six daily classes was only modified in the nineteen fifties and sixties by Vera Volkova, the Russian-trained dancer and teacher who became an artistic advisor to the company.

The Danish style emphasizes quickness in the legs and feet, an open but calmly composed torso and razor sharp clarity in poses, and the completion of steps. It avoids excess and

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stresses balance, restraint, and control. Because of Bournonville's own success as a first dancer, the system has a certain inherent bias which enables it consistently to produce outstanding male dancers of whom Martins is the most recent.

A tall, six-foot-four-inch, noble-looking dancer whose partnering ability made him a natural for the classics, Martins quickly established himself in the repertory. He just as avidly sought out opportunities to work with experimental dance presentations on the state-controlled national television network and worked with guest choreographers who regularly mounted productions for the company.

In 1967 he was asked on short notice to perform the lead role in Balanchine's "Apollo" in Edinburgh. It was a work in which he had been previously coached by Henning Kronstam of the Royal Danish Ballet. Martins found that Balanchine's own New York City Ballet danced the work with greater dynamic urgency and less grandeur than he was accustomed to, but welcomed the opportunity to make further guest appearances with the company, which he joined in 1970 as a principal.

The decision was necessary. He foresaw no further artistic challenge in Denmark, whereas the New York City Ballet had a vibrant and ever expanding repertoire of major ballets by Balanchine and Jerome Robbins. But the transition involved more than mastering a repertoire, it necessitated a basic change in style. The perfected craft that served the classic repertoire was not suited for the twentieth-century ballets he now encountered. Mastering new techniques of partnering, learning to dispense with preparatory stances, and sustaining the insistent musical flow of the new ballets proved to be his severest trial. The route to this knowledge came through Balanchine's classes which extended conventional pedagogy in new and unusual directions.

The reeducation process nearly caused him to leave the company, but in that dark night of trial he persisted and emerged as the finest male dancer of the new tradition. The aristocratic manner was replaced with self-assured dignity. The carefully wrought technical feats gave way to the fluent and understated virtuosity that is the mark of the Balanchine dancer. Most important, he awakened to the expressive possibilities of the balletic vocabulary organically developed as a visible language.

In addition to dancing in the established repertoire, roles were created for him in new ballets such as Balanchine's "Violin Concerto," "Duo Concertant," "Union Jack," "Vienna Waltzes," and Robbins's "The Goldberg Variations," "In G Major," and "Other Dances." When Robbins remounted "Fancy Free," Martins was given the part of the Latin dance sailor. Balanchine cast him as the male lead in restaging his elegant "Chaconne."

The variety of these roles is extreme and runs from the most restrained classicism of "Chaconne" to the knowing comedy of "Union Jack" and "Fancy Free" to the sensual, athletic vigor of "Violin Concerto." By the end of the seventies Martins had remade himself from the best Bournonville dancer of his generation to the best Balanchine dancer of his generation. The transformation places him in a special category: the dancer who has mastered old and new with equal facility. As if to drive home the point in 1976, he alternated as a guest artist with the Royal Danish Ballet at the Metropolitan Opera House dancing Bournonville's "La Sylphide," while maintaining his regular schedule with New York City Ballet at the New York State Theater, a stone's throw across Lincoln Center.

In 1978 he choreographed "Calcium Night Light," his first ballet, which was warmly received. He was encouraged by Balanchine to continue with other scores of Balanchine's choosing. Balanchine commented: "Diaghilev used to give scores to me to choreograph and now I am giving scores to Peter." The results have been marked by intelligence and skill and occasional flashes of imaginative invention. Martins came relatively late to the role of choreographer but is passionately involved with it. In part this passion has contributed to his decision to retire as a performer.

When he and Jerome Robbins were named Ballet Masters In Chief of the company during Balanchine's fatal illness last spring, that decision was accelerated. To maintain the quality of one's performance is a full-time job in itself. To choreograph, rehearse, decide on repertoire, and guide the development of over one-hundred dancers is a full-time job. Martins chose to retire at the top of his form. His performing career has been brilliant and will ever stay so. The effects of his stewardship will reveal themselves in coming years as he applies his alert, quiet intelligence to perfecting the talents of others. As a dancer he set fearsomely high standards.

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Stage

MEMORIES, HEARTBREAK

THREE CONTRASTING PLAYS

THERE IS a moment in C. P. Taylor's *And a Nightingale Sang . . .* in which the slightly crippled heroine-narrator is persuaded by her soldier lover that she can dance. It recalls a similar scene in Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* in which the Gentleman Caller leads the excessively shy Laura for a few turns around the Wingfield living room. In the first instance, the roof darkens and then is spotted with lights that wheel above the dancers, for all the world like the Starlight Roof in Indianapolis, the elegant big-city place to go when I was growing up in Indiana, although this dance floor is set in wartime Newcastle-on-Tyne. In *Menagerie,* the romantic aura and the incipient triumph of the girl is broken, as the horn of the glass unicorn is, when Laura and Jim brush against the table. The contrasting tone of these two scenes — the one ending in release, the other in withdrawal — marks the differences between the two memory plays, which happened to be on stage in New York at the same time.

Taylor's 1977 play, which reopened the Newhouse Theater at Lincoln Center, is the nostalgia piece, the sentiment fueled not only by those turning lights but by the songs that George Stott pounds out on the piano which sits in his kitchen. The Stotts are a working-class family: the father, an air-raid warden, a convert to Communism, and always and most sincerely a singer of pop songs; the mother, a Roman Catholic, completely absorbed in her church or at least in the well-being of the priests; the somewhat dotty grandfather; the pretty daughter in panic at marriage and sex; and plain Helen, who, unlike Laura in *Menagerie*, is the understanding and sensible center of the house until she moves into a flat with her soldier, who has a wife and child in another town. Not much happens in the course of the play (1939-45). Joyce adjusts at last to her soldier husband, and Helen loses her lover to his wife, but emerges still strong from the experience. A great deal happens off-stage in those years, but it never seriously threatens what we see. Perhaps because the war years were the years of Taylor's childhood and adolescence, his memory chooses not to focus on a devastating war. One might say that the play is about the survival of the family, but it is less that than a conventional family comedy, full of funny lines, solvable contretemps, nice character bits. Beautifully performed, particularly by Joan Allen as Helen, it is a warm and amiable evening in the theater, just made for anyone over fifty who wishes he could sing along on "The White Cliffs of Dover" or "A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square."

The Glass Menagerie, for all the sentiment in it, is a much darker play. If the hard edges are knocked off the Stotts in *Nightingale,* in *Menagerie* the Wingfield apartment is as much a battleground as it is a home. A very funny play and a touching one, it creates an Amanda who is both loving mother and monster, whose memories help smother Laura. She, in turn, is not a piece of glass but a young woman fading into dangerous isolation. Tom, who must escape to save himself, deserts his sister as his father did his mother, and the family dissolves as the off-stage world is doing in 1939.

The current production of *Menagerie* does not do as well by Williams's memory as the Newhouse production does for Taylor's. Jessica Tandy is a remarkable actress, always a pleasure to watch, but her odd phrasing misses the rhythm of Amanda. As a result, the likable, frightening steamroller of a Southern belle comes across as too much a thinking woman whose calculated pauses signal a self-awareness foreign to the character. Amanda Plummer lacks Laura's fragility, seeming too often a sturdy, sullen girl alongside the smaller Tandy. The character is primarily a watcher, a receiver of shocks, but in her one active scene, the one with the Gentleman Caller, Plummer finds the means to suggest the Laura who is not on hand for much of the evening. John Heard is excellent as the Gentleman Caller, the unsinkable role in the play, as Edward Albert impressively showed in the television produciton starring Katherine Hepburn — another distinguished actress who somehow missed Amanda. *And a Nightingale Sang. . . .*, with less to offer than *The Glass Menagerie*, is more satisfying in the theater, primarily because director Terry Kinney, from the Steppenwolf in Chicago, has a stronger sense of the English play than the celebrated John Dexter does of the American one.

Heartbreak House is no memory play — it was written out of the immediate anguish of World War I — but I will add a line or two here to indicate my pleasure in the revival at the Circle in the Square. It should have been less appealing than *Menagerie*, for Bernard Shaw is being treated cavalierly in a way that Williams is not. A great chunk has been cut out of his very long play — one character and his subplot is missing — yet the wit and the pain of the original remain. And so does Shaw's strong point about political and personal responsibility.

Most of the parts are well played (William Prince's Mazzini Dunn is the most disastrous exception) and some are excellent. Rosemary Harris is a fine heroine, and Philip Bosco gives an oddly conceived but very effective performance as Boss Mangan. Best of all are Rex Harrison's Captain Shotover, a believable old man whose physical and intellectual vigor is never in doubt, and Amy Iving's Ellie Dunn, played from the beginning with the kind of strength that makes credible her movement from romantic naiveté to cynicism to new certainty. Point by point, I could probably find more flaws in the Circle's *Heartbreak House* than in the new *Glass Menagerie*, but, for me, the Shaw production was a more rewarding theatrical experience.

GERALD WEALES

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Books: IS GOD DEAD, OR CONSTANTINE?

THE POLITICS AT GOD'S FUNERAL

Michael Harrington

Holt, Rinehart & Winston, $16.95, 273 pp.

Gregory Baum

AN ADMIRER of Michael Harrington's work, I looked forward to reading his new book on religion and the spiritual crisis of Western civilization. The book makes indeed very interesting reading. It is, however, not without its puzzlement. In fact, the principal thesis of the book remains somewhat ambiguous.

Harrington intends to demonstrate that the God of the inherited Judeo-Christian religion, who was the integrating principle of Western civilization, has died and been buried. This is his declared thesis. At one time God was of fundamental political importance: God legitimated the social institutions and the self-definition of society; God supplied the values and the vision that offered stability to society and promoted renewal and reform. This God is no longer alive. Rationalism, pluralism, secularism, i.e., the culture of industrial capitalism, have killed the divinity. The God in whom Christians continue to believe is no longer the old, political God; he is simply the gracious ground of their own subjectivity. Christianity as a political reality has ceased to exist.

This thesis is not startling. Historians and social scientists tend to be in agreement with it. In Christian theology this is called the end of the Constantinian Age. The task contemporary theologians have set for themselves is to explore and clarify the meaning of the Gospel after the collapse of the socio-political theism that legitimated Western civilization. As a secular, humanistic Marxist Harrington asks himself the corresponding question: Where do we now find the values that religious and non-religious people may endorse to promote the reconstruction of society?

In fact, however, Harrington does not remain faithful to his thesis. Throughout his study he seems to suggest that the political God of Western civilization is identical with the God of the Bible and that for this reason, the Christian religion itself has come to an end. While he insists minded himself that in early Christianity, has no metaphysical implications, and that his analysis of the Western predicament and his proposals for reconstruction may be acceptable to atheists as well as believers, his treatment of the philosophical issues implies that his thesis is wider. Harrington tends to identify the God who is dead and buried with the God of the Christian message. If he had used the expression, "the end of the Constantinian Age," he would have reminded himself that in early Christianity, prior to Constantine, the biblical God had a different, more critical socio-political thrust. As we shall see, this hidden, not fully acknowledged identification affects Harrington's reading of nineteenth and twentieth century philosophers and theologians.

Harrington's study begins with the Enlightenment. The inner contradiction of this new intellectual movement was that on the one hand it provided universal values such as rationality and freedom and that on the other it accepted the new industrial capitalism which assigned the great masses to conditions of grave oppression. Some authors, such as Hegel and Marx, realized that the new capitalism based on the quest for material gain was creating "an inverted world," a world — as Hegel said — in which good is evil and evil good. Yet even the philosophers who endorsed liberalism lamented the decline of virtue and the loss of values. In fact, they all sought a new principle of social integration, a substitute for the old political God who had lost his power.

Harrington shows that because of its built-in contradiction, Enlightenment reason tended to shy away from reflecting on human values and emancipation and identified itself more and more with empirical science and technology. Eventually Enlightenment culture simply promoted instrumental reason. No questions were asked about the end, about values, about the human substance. Capitalism created a society of self-promoters who used reason only to achieve their purposes. Positivism reigned. The same impoverishment of reason also took place in Marxism, except for the revisionist Western Marxists that sought to retrieve Marx's own concern with overcoming alienation in a reconciled society. Cristians and radicals lamented the waning of human values in Western civilization. Weber spoke of "specialists without spirit and hedonists without heart, non-entities who imagine themselves to have climbed to the never-before-achieved stage of humanity."

Harrington reads philosophers and theologians almost exclusively to demonstrate their contribution to the death of God. Sometimes this leads to distortions. He makes himself insensitive to those aspects of modern thought that sought to overcome the spiritual crisis.

In reading Kant he stresses the *Critique of Pure Reason* which confines certain knowledge to the scientific exploration of the material world, and belittles the *Critique of Practical Reason* as Kant's attempt to assure ordinary people that their inherited faith has a rationality of its own, even if not a scientific one. I find this curious. It was after all "practical reason," reason as the organ of human emancipation and the creation of a truly human society, that belonged originally to the Enlightenment, that following Kant became fruitful in Hegel and German Idealism, that was endorsed by Marx in his own way, and that critical Marxists of today are trying to retrieve. In his last chapter, Harrington himself turns to practical reason to establish values that lay claim to universality.

Again, reading Hegel, Harrington concentrates on his contribution to the death of God. He overlooks Hegel's attempt to

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overcome the spiritual crisis of Western civilization. Hegel recognizes the unbridgeable gap between the old religious consciousness and the new secular consciousness; he realizes that to find legitimating values for a truly human society there is no going back to the traditional divinity. Yet he envisioned bridging the gap through a new consciousness that was both religious (without being separate and otherworldly) and secular (without being Godless). He affirmed a non-dualistic theism that recognized the transcendent God as immanent in human history, present to people as critical judgment and progressive thrust. Recent Hegel interpreters as different as Emil Fackenheim and Rudolf Siebert have brought out this aspect with great clarity. If Harrington had acknowledged Hegel's attempt at synthesis, he would have gained a better understanding of contemporary theologians.

Harrington reads twentieth-century Christian theologians as witnesses to the death of God. Karl Barth proclaims the God who is absent. Harrington acknowledges Barth's progressive political witness, but he does not ask how the political stance of the Swiss theologian was related to his theology. Harrington regards the shift of many contemporary theologians from classical theism to what is called "panentheism" as a watering down of the traditional religion. Existentialist reflections as found in Bultmann and Rahner, moreover, reveal God's presence only in personal life, in subjectivity. This privatization — Harrington uses this term — is a sign that the old political God is no more. Theologians have become subtle and vague when dealing with the central beliefs of Christianity, God, and eternal life. Schillebeeckx's attempt to reread the Christian message in the new horizon created by modern society — something done by all contemporary theologians — is understood by Harrington as an attempt to change the old religion: the result is really no longer Christianity. A more careful reading of Hegel's philosophy of religion would have allowed Harrington to gain a more faithful understanding of theologians today.

Because his thesis is not just that the Constantinian Age has collapsed but that

WHITE HOUSE LITERARY LIFE

WHERE POLITICS & FICTION MEET

IT WAS Solon the Athenian, I believe, who initiated the ancient ideal that political leaders should also be men of literary culture, an ideal that was developed by Pericles and then given its classic formulation in Plato's *Republic*, with its conception of the philosopher king. It was Plato's pupil Aristotle who educated Alexander the Great in accordance with this ideal, and Alexander in turn served as a model for many centuries for Roman rulers and statesmen: Cato, the elder, Scipio the younger, Caesar, Cicero, Augustus, and almost every emperor, good or bad, down to Marcus Aurelius. Ironically it was Marcus, the most perfect embodiment of the philosopher king ever produced by the ancient world, who finally broke the string when he sired a son and successor, Commodus, whose principal extra-political interest was not books but horse racing.

In the United States the ideal of the literary statesman flourished as long as the afterglow of the Enlightenment lasted, that is, from George Washington through John Quincy Adams. Andrew Jackson's victory in 1828 marked the divorce between power and letters in America. Attempts at reconciliation between the two in the last century and a half have been exceedingly rare. The most recent, and probably the most successful ever, came during John Kennedy's brief administration; Robert Frost at the inauguration symbolized the New Frontier attempt to recapture some very ancient territory. After Kennedy the philistines returned to their traditional preeminence in Washington, where they have — at least so I thought till the other day — reigned happily ever since.

It was with this history in mind that I viewed as extremely encouraging the recent remarks about Ebenezer Scrooge made by Presidential Counselor Edwin Meese. Mr. Meese said that Scrooge, like the former dictator of Guatemala who was so well loved by the Reagan administration, had taken a bum rap; that Bob Cratchit, Dickens's economically illiterate opinion to the contrary notwithstanding, was not underpaid; that this was demonstrated by the fact that his wife, unlike the wives of American working men today, did not have to hold a job but was instead free to remain at home eating bonbons and watching soap operas at the neighborhood Punch and Judy show.

While I don't myself agree with this interpretation, the real point here is not the rightness or wrongness of the interpretation but — and this is what is so encouraging — the fact that the president's inner circle is discussing literary issues.

Now, I've made some inquiries in Washington and have been able to discover that once a week President and Mrs. Reagan host a literary seminar in the Cabinet Room, to which only high government officials are invited. I have been fortunate enough to obtain transcripts of several of these sessions (from a courageous White House insider who, committed to a free press, had to violate his secrecy oath to give them to me), and I offer the following excerpts.

U.N. Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick: "Macbeth has taken a bum rap. While his method of obtaining office was hardly the sort of thing we'd like to see in an ideal world, it is essential that we bear in mind that he was an authoritarian, not a totalitarian, ruler. True, he was unnecessarily brutal at times; his elimination with extreme

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Christianity has come to an end, Harrington does not ask himself what sociological form the new minority Christianity will take in the modern world. He argues that fundamentalists and some conservative denominations try to negate modernity and return to the settled security of the past, an endeavor that is clearly unrealizable. Harrington suggests that the major churches promote a religion that has become highly personal. Religion establishes subjectivity. In Troeltsch's term religion has here become a "cult." Some sociologists, for instance Talcott Parsons and Robert Bellah, have defended the social function of a highly personal religion. They argue that by establishing subjectivity people acquire the identity and personal integrity necessary to make the present social system work well. Harrington rightly refutes this argument. Existentialist religion has no social power. It becomes a cult. Indirectly it protects the *status quo*.

Harrington does acknowledge new Christian groupings in the third world and to a lesser extent in the first world. He even mentions in passing the new political theology made famous by writers such as Metz, Moltmann, and Sölle. But he does not analyze these new phenomena. The extraordinary creativity of theologians in the twentieth century, including Catholic theologians over the last decades, must surely be interpreted as a sign of vitality. Harrington would have discovered in the political theologians the same (Frankfurt School inspired) critique of "privatization" that he himself offers. He would have found the effort to find the appropriate, Gospel-inspired, politico-cultural role of the church after the collapse of the Constantinian Age and the rejection of ideological religion. In specifying the critical role of the Christian community these theologians base themselves on the experiences of ordinary Christians for whom the Gospel has become a divine summons to justice and emancipation. It can be shown that this trend has been endorsed by the leadership in the churches, most remarkably even in the papal and episcopal teaching of the Catholic church. Sociologically speaking the new minority Christianity is becoming a movement, a movement defined by its

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prejudice of Banquo was both nasty and pointless. But the really shocking crimes — the murder of Macduff's wife and children, for instance — were carried out by rightwing death squads who were, understandably enough, not totally subject to the king's control during a period of civil war. And Shakespeare points out that the left-wing guerrillas, headquartered in Birnam Wood (which Macbeth, very unwisely, refused to defoliate because of environmental side-effects), received clandestine shipments of arms, money, and even troops from England, whose imperialistic designs on Scotland are a matter of historical record. Of course Macbeth was handicapped by his wife, Lady Imelda Macbeth. But he was more seriously handicapped by the failure of previous American administrations to plug him into C.I.A. sources of information, thus forcing him to rely on the weird sisters, whose skill at disinformation, not to mention the repulsive broth they were fond of cooking up, suggests an Eastern European background."

Attorney General William French Smith: "Iago has taken a bum rap. By the time we get to meet him, of course, he had already been turned sour by many years of affirmative-action programs and their disastrous consequences. While Othello is an outstanding guy in many respects, he is no more qualified to be a general than is your typical colored All-American to be a quarterback. He grew up a tough little street fighter, knowing, as he admits himself, nothing but 'broil and battle' since he was seven years old. The only event connected with him that remotely resembles a victory is no victory at all but a piece of sheer luck, i.e., the storm that destroys the Turkish fleet on its way to Cyprus — unless of course you want to count the barroom brawl in Aleppo that led to his knifing the Turk who had spoken unflatteringly of Venice. Yet the Venetian liberal establishment had embarked — probably in connection with its African policy — on an affirmative-action program, so Othello, who was clearly the most presentable Negro they could find on the Rialto, had to be made a general. But the merit system, once undermined in this way, tends to disintegrate. Thus Othello himself, when appointing a lieutenant, disregarded the plainly superior merits, not to mention the great seniority, of Iago, in order to appoint Michael Casio, the flashy young mathematician from Florence, whose suave style, not his military abilities, recommended him. And then of course there was poor Desdemona, who was tragically misled by the affirmative-action program into believing Othello's title was a true index of his worth. Brabantio, it turns out, was correct in objecting to the marriage (though of course we deplore the racist language he used in arguing against it). He was the Jesse Helms of his day. But the Venetian Senate — like our own Senate in the Martin Luther King holiday case — was too gutless to do the right thing and annul the marriage."

President Reagan: "Well, Little Miss Muffet has taken a bum rap." (It should be noted that the president, due to his heavy workload, was dispensed from his original assignment, *The Girl of the Limber Lost*, and permitted to report on one of the shorter classics instead.) "The feminists find fault with her for running away instead of taking her spoon and beating the poor spider to death. But I think it's very ladylike of her to run away. After all, it's every spider's right to try, and every girl's duty to refuse."

Nancy Reagan: "Emma Bovary has really wanted was to be Queen of Beverly Hills. And what's wrong with verly Hills. And what's wrong with that?"

DAVID R. CARLIN, JR.

(David R. Carlin, Jr., is a Rhode Island state senator and teaches sociology at the Univesity of Rhode Island.)

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task or mission in the global society. The Christian church prior to Constantine was something like a movement, defined largely in ascetical and other-worldly terms. After the collapse of the Constantinian Age, the minority church may again become a movement, yet this time defined by an outer-oriented, critical, humanizing mission, by what has been called "the option for the poor." It is, therefore, overly hasty to anticipate the end of Christianity as a politico-cultural presence in the world. Harrington's tacit expansion of his principal thesis has significantly weakened his study.

At the same time, the praxis of Harrington's book is fully in accord with the aspiration of progressive Christians. The death of the political God, Harrington argues, has profoundly shaken Western civilization. The protector of human values has disappeared. Capitalist culture with its egoism and search for personal satisfaction is undermining the very basis of civilization, including the critical movements that work toward social reconstruction. The left itself has lost its vision of the *humanum*. It is imperative, Harrington argues, that those who love humanity, atheists and believers alike, following the thrust of practical reason, try to formulate emancipatory values that claim universality and sustain people's struggle for a just society. Harrington's brief proposals in the last chapter do not come as a surprise. He realizes, moreover, that such a project is very much in keeping with the traditional Catholic endeavor to formulate natural law imperatives. It is even more in keeping with the self-understanding of the post-Constantinian minority church, which looks for allies among secular humanists and in the world religions in order to work with them for the transformation of society. Here Michael Harrington's book makes an important contribution.

A thoughtful life

AN ADMIRABLE WOMAN

Arthur A. Cohen

Godine, $14.95, 220 pp.

David Tracy

AN ADMIRABLE WOMAN is a remarkable novel by one of our best novelists and theologians, Arthur A. Cohen. In a sense, in this novel both of Arthur Cohen's audiences meet. The theological community knows his work as that of one of our leading Jewish theologians. His theological range is unusual: extending from his early groundbreaking book, *The Natural and the Supernatural Jew*, to his extraordinary theological reflection on the Holocaust entitled *The Tremendum*.

The wider community knows Arthur Cohen as one of our best novelists — a novelist of ideas, persons, atmospheres. Once again, his work extends through a series of astonishingly different novels: *In the Days of Simon Stern* and *A Hero in His Time* to *Acts of Theft*. Mr. Cohen is a theologian's theologian whose exceptionally thoughtful sensibility pervades but never controls his novels. Indeed the novels, in a manner rare in our time, are empowered by ideas but never give into the temptation of becoming, in effect, lectures with slides. The characters, the atmosphere, the life of each of his stories move the reader to a characteristic Cohenian sensibility of thoughtfulness: this is the way we live in this place and time; this is the way we could, if we would but dare, think.

An Admirable Woman is Arthur Cohen's most challenging work to date. The challenge is one that few novelists have attempted and fewer still have achieved: what is it like to think? More exactly, what is it like to give a life over to thought in this incredible century? We follow the main character, Erika Hertz, through her life from childhood in a secularized Jewish family in the Berlin of the twenties and thirties to her later life as an intellectual "celebrity" (that peculiarly American fate) in New York. As we do so, we find ourselves compelled to agree with the subtly ironic title: Erika Hertz is an admirable woman living and thinking in a time of the *tremendum*. Erika Hertz rejects sentimentality and embraces thoughtfulness. By that rare set of choices, we discover, as the story unfolds, that she forms a character which is unquestionably admirable and a life which is a believable life here and now.

When did any of us last read a novel whose main character actually thinks? Not daydreams, not fantasies, not attempts at one more round of alienated "self-expression." No, Erika Hertz is a rare but entirely believable creation: she thinks and she shows what it means to think not as a withdrawal from life but as an entry into it.

Thinking has always been an exceptional calling: as German culture with its fine distinction between a 'scholar' and a 'thinker' (*ein Denker*) knows. Martin Heidegger and Hannah Arendt were thinkers. Most of their critics were scholars. It has been reported that Heidegger, in his lectures, could only bring himself to give the following information on the life of a great predecessor-thinker: "Aristotle was born, he lived, he thought, and he died." Fair enough — but what is the meaning of that "he lived"? What does it mean to live a life given over to thinking then or now?

An Admirable Woman answers that troubling question. Erika Hertz is a thinker. She is also a thinker forced to live a life of thought in an age of rampant thoughtlessness. Her very commitment to thought in this age forces her, contrary to her desires, into a life of publicness: a life dedicated to thinking upon action, history, politics, the public realm. For Erika Hertz, as a Jew and a thinker, has been forced by the history of her place and time to abandon the traditional protective device of the thinker: to withdraw from the public realm. Erika Hertz

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knows that to expose thought to that realm is to risk self-destruction. For that realm cannot provide a natural dwelling place for the thinker. And that realm has turned upon itself in her own lifetime: the time of the obscene slogans and actions of Nazi Germany and the genial but dangerously thoughtless actions of her adopted land, the United States. What makes Erika Hertz admirable — beyond her own self-irony on that term, beyond her own attempts to live a private life with friends and family, beyond her insistence on facing her own limitations, physical, intellectual, and moral — is that Erika Hertz will neither cease thinking nor withdraw from the public realm.

As American intellectuals now stumble into a history governed by our literally thoughtless leaders, we would do well to reflect — on and with Erika Hertz — on what a life of thinking can be. There are greater and more admirable human types than the thinker — the saint or witness for one. But without the thinkers we are lost. And without the rest of us — without history, politics, the public realm in all its confusion, even horror — the thinker is now lost. Erika Hertz knows both these unwelcome truths: she thinks them, she lives them.

Perhaps, like her, we have all become Weimar intellectuals now. And through this "admirable woman" we can sense what thinking can mean as distinct from what passes for it for most of us most of the time. *An Admirable Woman* is, quite simply, a great novel: a *Bildungsroman* in and for a period where the possibility of *Bildung* seems lost. And yet, through Erika Hertz, we are reminded that this thought, however sobering, however welcome, is not the final word.

REVIEWERS

GREGORY BAUM *is professor of religious studies and sociology at St. Michael's College, Toronto. His books include* Religion and Alienation, The Social Imperative, *and* The Priority of Labor.

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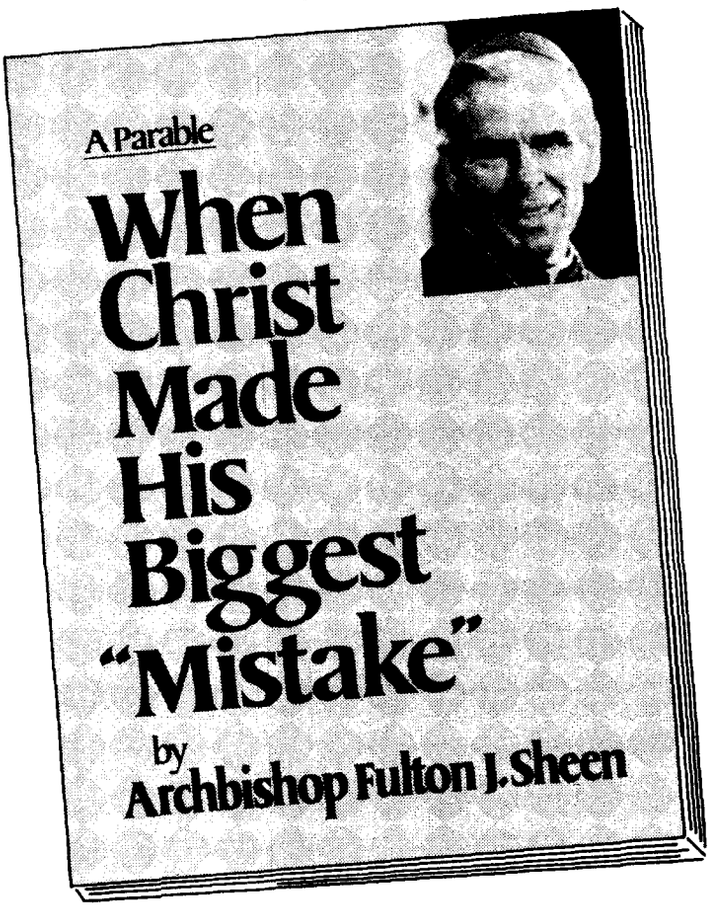

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A chronicle of disillusionment

ETHNIC DILEMMAS, 1964-1982

Nathan Glazer

Harvard, $20, 359 pp.

Fred Siegel

WRITING in the early 1960s Oscar Gass shrewdly noted that "The status of the Negro is no transient squabble. . . . Its issues," he went on, "have such a reach that in speaking to their substance, a man may characterize his whole mind and personality." Nathan Glazer is such a man. For thirty years Glazer, by almost any standard one of America's foremost intellectuals, has been speaking to the issues of social and cultural diversity. Topically the sixteen essays reprinted in this collection, from the many he has written, range over black-Jewish relations, the black family, the social basis for tolerance, affirmative action (or as Glazer would put it, affirmative discrimination), bi-lingualism, the emergence of multi-ethnic societies in Western Europe, and federalism and ethnicity.

The reader familiar with Glazer's work might quibble over the selections. He has not chosen to reprint his late 1960s articles from *Commentary* and *Encounter* which capture the heated feelings of those years, while including a number of dry academic set-pieces, and he has reprinted his 1966 essay on the black family without so much as noting how Herbert Gutman's subsequent *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom* upset many of his assumptions. But these problems aside, the book is a fair representation of Glazer's beliefs.

Two themes run through the essays. First there is his emphasis on pluralism as the means to accommodate ethnic diversity. An early supporter of the civil rights movement, it was Glazer's hope that blacks could be brought into the broad pluralist fold which he insists, probably correctly, is the only long-term basis for adaptation. In America, he explains approvingly, the basis for ethnic accommodation has traditionally been to withhold the formal recognition of group rights, but to allow "every informal recognition of their right and desire to self-development, assimilation, or integration at their own chosen rate," along with the right to "independent social, religious, and political institutions" as part of a united country.

The principle, he concedes sorrowfully, was violated in practice for blacks, but he insists, and this is the other major thrust of his essays, that the pluralist model which incorporated the turn-of-the-century immigrants has in fact been far more successful than is generally realized in drawing blacks into the mainstream of American life. Rebutting those who claim the black experience is radically different from that of all other groups, Glazer notes: "Blacks probably have more college graduates than Polish Americans, more political muscle than Mexican Americans, more clout in the

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mass media than Italian Americans." It is the comparison of "blacks" against "whites," he argues, that shows such sharp distinctions. Given time, he suggests, the natural processes of group accommodation would incorporate blacks. If he stopped here Glazer would simply be presenting a more sophisticated version of Irving Kristol's famous "The Negro Today Is Like the Immigrant Yesterday." But Glazer, far less the polemicist, realizes that, middle-class black mobility over the past thirty years notwithstanding, it is the persistence and even growth of a black underclass during these same years which makes the black situation different.

Too honest to avoid the issue entirely, Glazer nonetheless gives short shrift to the problem of the black underclass. The subject frustrates him and in an extraordinary passage he exclaims, "Perhaps the tragedy of this country is that it did not become two nations," or as he put it in a *Commentary* symposium, "Maybe it would have been better if we hadn't fought the Civil War at all." Glazer's favored pluralist model, once so appropriate for Northern immigrant cities, is simply unable to offer hope to the Southern victims of racism who migrated north in the forties and fifties only to fall prey to the processes of automation which eliminated the unskilled jobs that allowed earlier people to get a toehold on the mobility ladder.

To be fair, no one has come forth with a convincing program to incorporate the black underclass into American life, and Glazer himself does an effective job of explaining why employment quotas which aid the already upwardly mobile are likely to exacerbate ethnic tensions while doing little to relieve black poverty. The problem lies in the explosive interaction of racial quotas and the new immigration. In the introduction Glazer describes the case of recent, highly skilled immigrants, scrambling and politicking to have themselves designated "disadvantaged" people in order to receive the benefits of government largesse. Similarly Glazer castigates the federal judges who have insisted on applying the Southern pattern of race (where "one great division smothered all others") to the desegregation cases of the Northern cities, where there was no "single white community." The South, Glazer points out, contradicting the oft quoted remark by Malcolm X, does not begin at the Canadian border. In the more current essays Glazer comments that the new immigrants only add to the problem: how can numerically designated racial balance be achieved in the cities of California where there are four-way divisions between Anglo, Mexican, black, and Asian populations?

"The fight against discrimination," Glazer states categorically, "chose the wrong solution." But Glazer is bereft of a solution of his own. Consequently Glazer's essays provide not a pluralist's alternative prescription for the future, but rather a chronological record of one former liberal's disillusionment with the civil rights movement.

> *Perhaps the tragedy of this country is that it did not become two nations, because the two sections have developed such a radically different orientation to the facts of ethnic diversity. I believe the main reason the argument that there is a radical discontinuity between ethnic experience and black experience is so powerful is the South—because there it is true, and because Southern attitudes have not been limited to the South. They have been brought North. . .* —Nathan Glazer
> *Ethnic Dilemmas*

Correspondence

(Continued from page 66)

scholarship, is not and should not be a place for biased or unbalanced views.

There is no way, however, to anticipate the nature of a lecture or the way it will be presented. This is the price one has to pay for freedom of speech and intellectual liberty.

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